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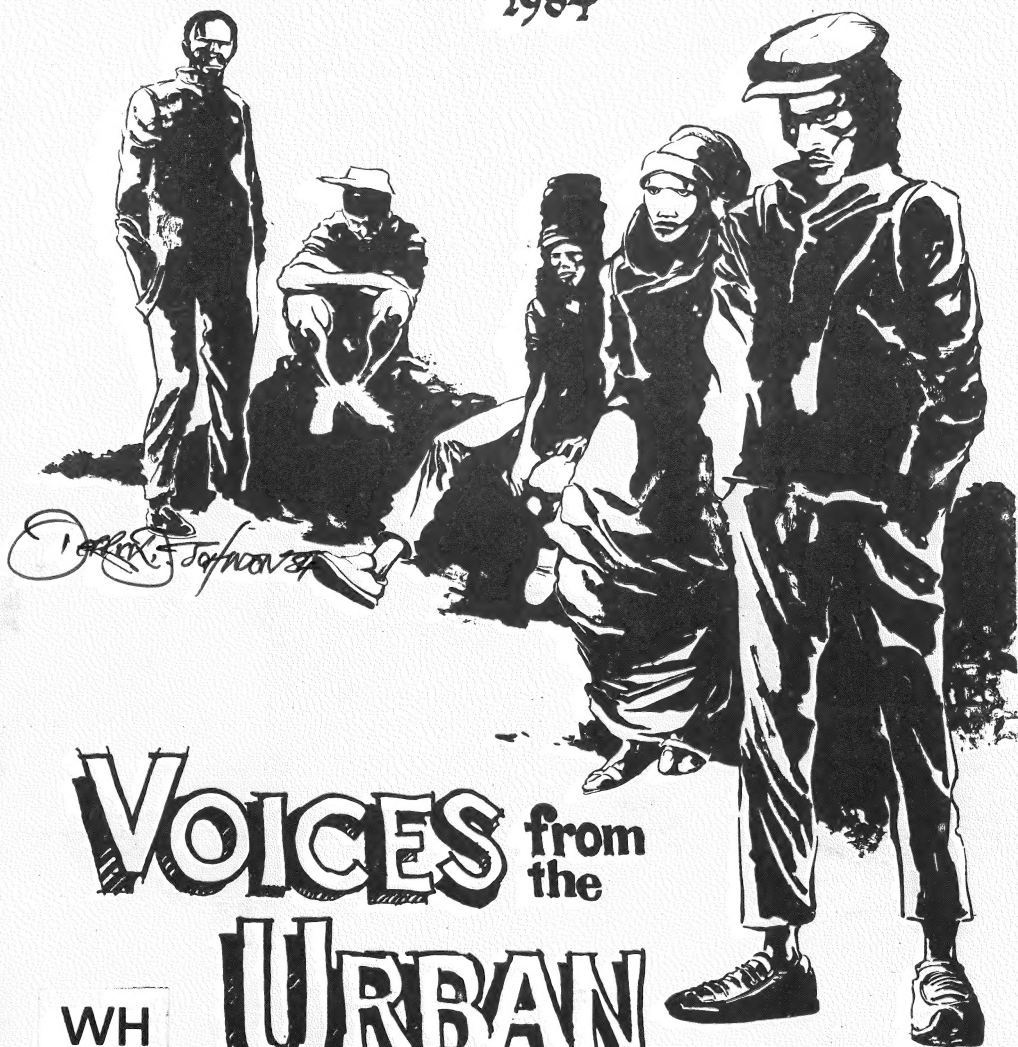
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*Bristol Jubilee Group
Lent Lectures from St. Paul's Bristol.
1984*



VOICES from the
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WILDERNESS

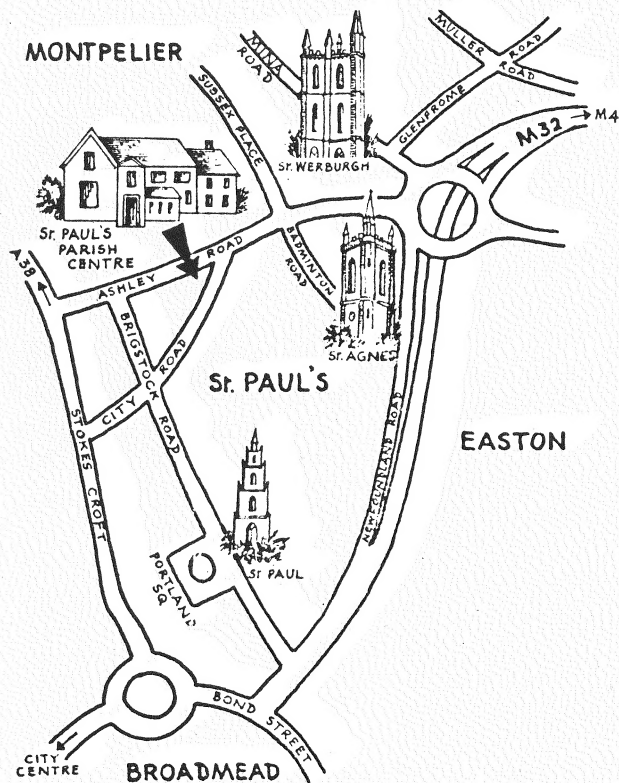
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Christian Ministry in the St. Paul's area of Bristol, involving the Parish Churches of St. Paul, St. Agnes, and St. Werburgh.



VOICES FROM THE URBAN WILDERNESS

"The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has annointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the down trodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."

(Isaiah - quoted by Jesus: Luke 4)

Six lectures on the Christian Churches' response to, and ministry in, the inner city.

A contribution to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas.

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Foreword by the Bishop of Malmesbury

One of the apparent differences between the modern church and the current political scene is that the former is more likely to publicise its failures than the latter. When did you last hear politicians admitting that they have got it wrong?

And this is a natural source of annoyance to many hard working, deep-praying Christians. They feel both undervalued and unnoticed by the very people who ought to be exhibiting them as evidence of a church which is very much alive.

But politicians are less likely to refer back to some ancient blue print which sits in judgement on their current actions. There are no Commandments or Sermons on the Mountain hanging over local or general elections. And although the word 'Radical' hovers menacingly over some election platforms, it has an air of extremism - even out of dateness about it - which smacks of past certainties found wanting; not in keeping with an electronic age.

The church is different. Whatever it does today gets measured against an ancient standard. It may have to exist relative to the present political condition (e.g. in Eastern Europe or awakening Africa or South America) but its ultimate point of reference is fixed for ever - the kind of God revealed in Christ.

So Christians are always having to measure their current lives against an ancient revelation. But they do so in the belief that this revelation is timeless; people's relationship with God and their relationship with each other and with the material world must be of the same quality as those of the first Apostles.

At least, this is how it seems historically. But all is not as it seems. Because if Christ is risen, it means that the reference point is not over-the-shoulder to a bench mark two thousand years old, but to the present moment. The question is not: "Are we conforming to the ancient pattern?" but "Is the ever risen Christ rising now in me?" Or even "Is there enough evidence of resurrection in me to justify the passion of Christ?"

This is why a Christian is called to be more "Radical" than any political adherent-radical in the sense of going to the roots. And the roots are here and now. We are like people who tap a great tree and believe that the same sap pours through us, yesterday, today and for ever. We should therefore have no fear in noting our failures. If God is living, he wants us to get things right, and now. It all depends on whether you think of life as climbing a ladder or deepening the pattern of a circle. It's depressing to keep slipping back a rung or two - (we always like to think we are climbing) - and talking about failure always gives the impression that we are dropping back in the race for heaven. But if the divine pattern is circular - a daily, perhaps hourly, cycle of dying and rising, failure and starting again - then not only do we not need to fear self criticism; we must break ourselves into it. Because it is the way of God.

I was very much aware of this during the Lent lectures at St Paul's Church, Bristol. All six speakers care passionately about what happens to and in the church. All of them go to the roots of faith for their points of reference. And all see the admission of failure as a springboard for life.

The opening lecture by Dr. Denis Turner is both witty and trenchant. He sees the church's relative success in the suburbs as limited, not because it is a bad thing to have a full suburban church, but because the guest list around the Lord's table is usually limited to the healthy, wealthy and wise. Our modern liturgies have acquired the accents of social justice, but there is little evidence of the deprived and disadvantaged round our altars. Perhaps this is asking unreal things of suburbia; and the inner problems of suburbia are just as real and painful as those of people who cannot afford such problems. But Dr. Turner does remind us that when we meet at the altar we are celebrating a passionate failure as well as a risen Lord; and failure, weakness and the unlovely must have a place at our banquet if the parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14, 12-14) is anything to go by.

Canon Eric James gives thanks for the church of his youth and his parents in downtown London. For him, community became the mark of Christianity. But he recognises the danger of entering any community as a means of escape. If the Ark of Salvation sails happily past the lives of those who have never known love, what kind of a God does what kind of a church offer? Corporateness, yes; elitism, no. And where are the clergy willing to sail through the turbulent waters of our urban rapids?

The whole series of lectures was based on Jesus' first sermon at Nazareth. Each speaker took a line from the words of Luke 4, 18-19.

"The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has annointed me;
he has sent me to announce good news to the poor,
to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind;
to let the broken victims go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

So the most radical lecture is that of Kenneth Leech. He was faced with proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favour", and had no trouble in equating this with the Old Testament Year of Jubilee. And whether we Christians like it or not, the Year of Jubilee had three definite intentions. Firstly, all land belongs to God; but because people are unequal in ability, it isn't long before some have much and many have little. So, says the Lord God, every so often (in a Year of Jubilee) this must be rectified, because it is all **my** land in any case. The implications for a church holding a lot of land are obvious. Secondly, the Year of Jubilee meant the cancelling of debts. Debt is a paradigm of social evil. And in any case, riches are an impediment to salvation in the Gospel. There ought not to BE any riches to be given away. And lastly, the Year of Jubilee meant the freeing of workers. No man must be another's slave. It is some such kingdom that Jesus sensitised us to in the Gospels - not a denial of abilities but a sharing of life.

It doesn't need much imagination to translate this ancient situation into modern equivalents. It is a well argued chapter and a troubling one. And its basis - undeniably biblical - is that our salvation is primarily corporate not individual. Christ died for mankind, not for a lucky segment.

Professor Townsend echoes both the previous chapters (speakers) in a plea for our corporate nature as humans sharing the frail human condition. He produces a wealth of statistics to show how nearly fifteen million people in Great Britain are living below, on or just above what the government of the day judges to be "the subsistence level", and that personal obligation to a child's party or a grandparent's birthday can tilt a week's balance into deprivation. Again, the church as a caring, sharing body is only a preliminary answer.

In 1745, one fifth of the population of London was black. This little known fact from Father David Moore reveals the extent to which we have chosen to deny black/yellow/coloured people their history in our country. It was their own country they fought for in 1940. The need for liberation from any kind of prejudice (against women, the young, northerners, accents on all sides, the list is endless) is a primary call of the Gospel of Christ. How do we enter the sufferings of others and uphold each other? is a question facing any one of us every day. But the diversity of humanity, like the diversity of a family, is its most enriching element, as any family reunion can testify.

And finally, Deaconess Pellett brings home the challenge of where the clergy should be serving. In a church called to be a servant community, the church's lack of strategy in the urban areas is a sad indictment of its grasp of the Gospel. The Deaconess wisely points out that the poor have such gifts to offer to the rest, human gifts which are often overlaid by gold-rust in other areas.

What these lectures have in common is a firm grasp of the corporate failure/salvation of us all. When a boat sinks, the rich may die later than those trapped in the engine room, but they die nevertheless, and they have longer to think about it and more to lose. In a country in which cutbacks in spending usually start with education, social services and health, it has become increasingly necessary for the church to take a fresh look at its root beliefs, which are less to do with ecclesiastical order than with the broken elements of the world. For me, the book creates the vivid picture of a Beggar's Banquet. It is an odd and unaccustomed picture, because such diversity is not usually present in any one church. But Dr Turner's picture of the Lord's banquet as being a socialite's nightmare is a cutting one; because the Lord looks at the whole of his family at once, and he knows that churches find it harder to become inclusive than exclusive, clubs for escape (as Canon Eric James put it) rather than centres of compassion.

Much as I agree with Kenneth Leech's analysis of the implications of the Year of Jubilee, I cannot see the abolition of the capitalist system as being the only platform for reform. We, like Jesus, start from where we are, rather than where we would like to be. The very fact that they had to have a Year of Jubilee every fifty years shows the natural gravitation of man towards self interest under any system. Lead does not suddenly float, without ceasing to be lead, and we were, are and always will be broken, hopeful, sinful, idealistic and fallen people, touched at wondrous points by some sense of the absolute love of God, which demands an 'all' which none of us possesses alone.

And the word 'alone' is vital. It is not just that God in Christ will, and does, make up for our inadequacies (a civilised word for sin, failure, selfishness etc.). If we take the phrase "The body of Christ" seriously, it means that we only acquire a sense of wholeness when we actually operate together - and this includes the 'less honourable parts' of the body which St Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 12, 14-26. They are **all** necessary, if the body of Christ is to function properly. We are not shining robots; we have unattractive features, slimy glands, angular joints etc. Even the sleek Ferrari needs oil and rubber, wire and petrol.

In practice, this means congregations which actually welcome the apparently unattractive, the lonely, the depressed, the uncommunicative and the local outcast. It means a 'highways and byways' job, performed not out of **duty** to a highflown moral code, but as part of a vision of the **whole** body of Christ. When Christ said "Love your enemies", he meant those who are alien to our 'way', our temperament, our 'kind' as well as those who actively dislike us. He meant the handicapped and the poor, the elderly and the loutish, the deviant, the ignorant and the obstinate as well as the relative beautiful people. And even those of us who might claim to be 'private' people could have their privacy respected as well as their existence recognised, and embraced.

It is a colossal task which faces the churches. And it is one which we have only become widely aware of during the last thirty years. There have always been pockets of sanctity throughout the Christian world, and the English as a whole have always admired the mad saints without desiring to join their company. But it is at last bearing in on us that in a church which has lost social as well as political control of the people, we are actually being required to use the original weapons of our armoury - the belt of truth, integrity as a coat of mail, the Gospel of peace and the shield of faith, and above all, that desire (rather than need) to give **ourselves** rather than our leftovers. At the heart of our faith is One who gave himself so that we might understand **what** Bishop Trevor Huddleston once called "This most precious human treasure, the opportunity of love itself".

It is a challenge with incalculable rewards, and the lectures which follow are very definitely pressing us to accept it.

† Peter Malmesbury

INTRODUCTION - Father Peter Barnett.

In the evening of April 2nd 1980 the Bishop was celebrating a Confirmation service for the Anglican Team Ministry in St. Paul's, Bristol at St. Agnes' church. However, during the afternoon and continuing through to evening events were taking place on the streets of St. Paul's which put it on the front page of the newspapers for several days to come.

These "inner city riots" as they became known anticipated a basic pattern of violence that was repeated in almost every major city with a black population "precipitating a crisis of race relations unprecedented in the post war era and a crisis of law and order unprecedented since the 1930's."*

These events in St. Paul's, Bristol which are now well documented in "To ride the Storm"; "The 1980 Bristol Riots and the State" by Harris Joshua and others (Heinemann 1983) shocked many people in Bristol and the country at large. However, they came as no surprise to many local people including many in the local churches.

The area of Bristol now commonly known as St. Paul's comprises the neighbourhood areas of St. Agnes', St. Werburgh's, Montpelier and St. Paul's. It is a relatively small area sandwiched between the new M32 motorway and the city centre Broadmead shopping area, together with Avon County Council offices. About 12,000 people live in the area in a variety of types of houses and flats, most of which have been the subject of housing action areas in recent years.

The St. Paul's area, like so many other inner city areas has been the subject of many surveys and reports, all of which confirm and emphasise the many aspects of poverty and multiple deprivation. For example, in one part of St. Paul's 44% of economically active men and 29% of economically active women were not in employment, compared with 7% and 13% for Bristol as a whole.

These kind of statistics are well known throughout the urban priority areas of British cities. These lectures attempt to put a theological/Christian/church strategy for prayer, thought and action in the context of this particular inner city area.

These lectures were delivered in St. Paul's church on Tuesday lunch-times in Lent. They followed a celebration of the Eucharist and concluded with an informal period of discussion.

The content of these lectures is offered as evidence to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. I hope the Synods and Councils of the Diocese of Bristol will also use these lectures to develop a strategy for mission and ministry that gives priority to Urban Priority Areas in the Diocese.

I am very grateful for the help and encouragement that have been given by many people in the organization and production of these lectures. Particularly I would like to thank the newly formed Bristol Jubilee Group, whose idea they were in the first place. I am very grateful for the support given by St. Paul's Church and Vestry. I would also like to thank Angela Osborne, Libby Jewel, Beryl Hodges and Jo Emery, who between them have typed and checked the manuscripts. Any inaccuracies in the scripts and lack of acknowledgements I must take responsibility for and duly apologise. Finally I must thank Derrick Johnson from St. Pauls and the Multi Cultural Education Centre for drawing and designing the cover.

Peter Barnett
(SS. Peter & Paul 1984)

NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

- Dr. Denys Turner** - is a lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol University. Author of **Marxism and Christianity** (Blackwell 1983) and of other articles on related topics. He is an Executive Committee member of the Catholic Institute for International Relations and a former member of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy's Laity Commission.
- The Rev. Canon Eric James** - worked at a riverside wharf on the Thames before he was ordained. Besides having been an inner city vicar he was Chaplain of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was Director of "Parish and People" in the 60's and is now Director of Christian Action. He frequently broadcasts and appears on T.V. He is author of "Odd Man Out" on the priesthood today.
- The Rev. Kenneth Leech** - is Race Relations Field Officer of the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility. Formerly Rector of St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green. He is a founder member of the Jubilee Group. He has written several books and articles including "Soul Friend" - a study of spirituality (1977); "True Prayer" (1980) and "The Social God" (1981).
- Professor Peter Townsend** - is Professor of Social Policy at Bristol University. He was Professor of Sociology at the University of Sussex. He is a local resident of St. Paul's, Bristol and is actively involved in local issues as well the ChildPoverty Action Group. He is the author of many books and articles including "The Social Minority" (1973); "Poverty in the United Kingdom" (1979) and co-author of "The Poor and the Poorest" (1975).
- The Rev. David Moore** - is curate of St. Matthew's Parish Church, Brixton. Before ordination in 1980 he was Head of the Religious Studies Department at Tulse Hill School in Lambeth. He has written, lectured and broadcast on aspects of multi-cultural Britain and Black Theology, including Rastafarianism.

- Sister Julia Pellett** - is a Methodist Deaconess who was ordained in 1968. She has exercised her ministry in central Liverpool, Preston and Birmingham and has been in her present appointment at the Methodist Church of St. Philip's in Knowle West, Bristol for the last seven years. She is a member of the Inner City Committee of the Home Missions Division of the Methodist Church.
- The Rt. Rev. Peter Firth** - was made Bishop of Malmesbury (Suffragan Bishop in the Diocese of Bristol) at the end of 1983, having been Director of Religious Broadcasting for the B.B.C. in Bristol.
- The Rev. Peter Barnett** - is Team Rector of the St. Paul's area in Bristol, including the parish churches of St. Agnes', St. Werburgh's and St. Paul's. He was formerly a parish priest in Central Walsall and Wolverhampton.

CHAPTER 1

GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR - DENYS TURNER.

Success or Failure?

I gather that part of the inspiration for this series of meetings is a certain sense of the failure of the Church's mission in the British inner city. This failure - for I suppose that it is a failure - is, I am sure, a worry. Indeed perhaps that failure of mission in the inner city is almost as worrying as ought to be that relatively higher degree of success of the Church's mission in the lush pastures of suburban and rural Britain. For that too is a worry; at least, it ought to be, when set beside the other failure. But before I begin sounding too deliberately paradoxical, I had better explain.

I don't think there is any reason to doubt that the Church's mission to the inner city is not a success story. But the assumption that it can be judged a failure on a standard of comparison with success elsewhere is one which begs a lot of questions; most particularly it begs the question of what ought to count as 'success' anywhere. And I think that it would be as well to begin this series by challenging that assumption, that the churches are more successful in the suburbs than they are in the inner-city and urban priority areas.

Invalid Comparison

I think we should begin this way not because those who are at the leading edge of the Church's work in the inner city believe this assumption for one minute; in fact, quite the opposite. One of the things which you very quickly discover if, like, say, John Vincent, you rethink your pastoral approaches from within the agenda of priorities the inner city imposes, is just how questionable is that very success of the Church by the standards of which it is said to fail in the inner city. We may indeed fail there, but it is not by the standard of suburban success that we fail.

In any case, I am frankly not at all sure that I know what a 'successful' pastoral ministry looks like anywhere. I mean, I am not at all sure what should count as success. Fuller churches? We do, most of us, make a better stab at filling our churches in the more affluent suburbs than in the city. Fuller participation in the liturgy? A more actively communitarian feel about our parish life? A more active engagement of local church in local community affairs...? Again, these are things which can look like success, or at least a higher rate of success, in middle-class suburbs than in the oppressive wastelands of the inner city. And perhaps we are especially tempted to look upon these things as successes because they do, after all, take quite a lot of work to achieve.

Christ's Priority for the Poor

All the same, it is possible to be caused to doubt whether these should be our standards of success or failure on a quite general theological principal. If what we preach as Christians enjoys a relatively greater measure of welcome among those who are relatively healthy, financially secure and well-housed than it does among the lonely, unhappy, unhealthy and unemployed, is not

what we preach put in question in **either** place? I know that Jesus by no means preached **only** to the poor; but, on his own account, the test of the authenticity of his preaching lay in no results gained from preaching to the rich, but in its being offered **first** to the poor, and by someone who preached from within a real solidarity with their poverty. And so it was that it was only from within that solidarity that Jesus could preach, without condescension, of a poverty of **spirit**. That is not a message he ever addressed to the rich. To them, Jesus addressed a quite different proposition about the extreme difficulty they would have even in understanding what he meant by his 'Kingdom and its justice' - unless, that is, they too sought, as a necessary condition, a primary solidarity with the poor.

Personal Witness and the Witness of the Person of Christ

It is important to get this right. I happen to think that it is not honest, at our present historical juncture, to live out the witness to Christ without an at least implicit commitment to socialist programmes within the Marxist tradition. On the other hand, I do not think there is the slightest evidence that Jesus was a proto-socialist or that an egalitarian distribution of incomes was a necessary condition of what he called 'his justice'. That would be but an absurd anachronism. He did, however, know a great deal about power and the desire to preserve the apparatus of power, and he knew particularly well how class, racial and economic power could be served by religious and theological alibis. He knew and suffered from that sheer refusal to listen to the alliance between wealth, power and ecclesiastical interest. He was killed because he took too close an interest in undermining that alliance.

Alliances - Ours or Christ's?

It was as a result of this alliance that Jesus never expected to get very far with the rich. That in itself is suggestive of what is at the root of our own bad conscience. For ours is the opposite experience of getting rather further with the rich than with the poor. Which naturally raises the question of **our** alliances. We cannot really be succeeding, even with the rich, if we are failing with the poor, even if we are filling some churches with the one and hardly any with the other. To be blunt: whatever it is that brings Christians together in affluent subergia cannot be a solidarity in Christ unless it brings them together in solidarity with the plight of the inner city. What succeeds with the well-found cannot be the good news unless it is first of all bad news for any such power or possessions of theirs as diminish and humiliate others. What works with the healthy cannot be Christ's healing if it is only a sort of spiritual private health clinic for the already strong.

Community/Club Mentality?

I thought it appropriate to begin with this thought because, simply, it is where I personally begin from: namely, the experience of a middle-class parish community and its problems. Like so many other Christians similarly situated, I suppose I have spent far too much time looking within the parish itself for the sources of its inertias and paralyses, for those mechanisms which generate within it a familiar paradox. The paradox, at least, is evident enough. It

consists on the one side in some evidence of apparent vitality - a Sunday service attendance rate of near to 50% of its members, plus a relatively high participation rate in a variety of parish activities and, I think it fair to say, a fairly perceptible sense of something called 'community'. But it consists also, on the other side, in an almost complete failure of this parish communitarianism to register on anything else much outside of itself, except (I noticed on my way down here) on the licence of the local sex shop.

Our Expression of Faith

Now this is, at first sight, puzzling. After all, quite apart from the other churches in our area, over 1000 good Bishopston people gather every Sunday in my church to take part in an intensely discomfiting celebration of the depths of human failure and degradation; they celebrate and claim they wish to be drawn into a solidarity with each other and through the necessity of a personal journey through that failure; and they acknowledge together a collective responsibility to proclaim to all men and women the necessity of passing through that failure and degradation if any hope is to break in upon our common condition. That, after all, is the meaning - is it not? - of their common Baptism and separate Eucharists for all Christians equally.

Liturgical Renewal

What is more, under the pressure of influences - ranging from the Vatican Council to our increased awareness of the brutal conditions of injustice and exploitation under which our Latin American brother and sister Christians - worship and work - we have begun to glimpse the practical implications of our own celebrations in terms of a concrete, real commitment to social justice. Our liturgies at least have acquired the accents of a new rhetoric of justice: we can at least, now, use the language of 'the option for the poor'; we do, at least, pray for peace with confidence, when wars are elsewhere - though I seem to remember that we did so with rather more precious delicacy during the Falklands War: it was important to pray only imprecisely for those who drowned in the Belgrano. On the other hand, the unemployed are always with us, and few Sundays pass without some sort of prayer 'for' them.

Lived Liturgy?

Now what is at first sight rather puzzling about this is that while the implications for justice of our Eucharistic celebrations are broadly accepted **within** the conduct of the Eucharist itself, the connection between the two appears to dissipate with complete spontaneity upon the last 'Amen' of the liturgy. And in our parish there are people who have noticed this and have asked why nobody else seems to notice it. Well, at second sight it isn't really puzzling at all. We are witnessing what I have learned from Marxism to call the 'genius of an ideology' at work - working at the very heart of the Church's own central mystery, working at the very point where the Church gathers itself together so as to be most truly and authentically itself: in its Eucharist. Its genius works upon that mystery so as to corrupt it into a **mystification**, an ideological effect which I am not going to analyse formally now but will say only this about: an ideology is a social practice which converts the concrete into the

abstract - converts the Word made flesh into the flesh made mere word; an ideology allows the truth to be uttered on condition that its utterance displaces its being done. And so an ideology has done its work when we have found in it a purely gestural, abstract, imaginary relation with reality, when it has therefore protected us from the threat of a real relationship with it by means of ever more frequent gestures towards it. It is therefore both very necessary to mention 'the unemployed', but to do it very tactfully and without any economic analysis; it is therefore very necessary to mention 'the handicapped' and imperative that we do not mention the cuts in the health service which have them often two to a room in local authority homes; we must pray for racial harmony, and perhaps even moralise about our own secret indifference and complicity, but we must not name 'Stop and Search'. Indeed, there is an exact ratio of specificity to abstraction, a subtle and delicate balance which it is the genius of ideology to maintain. That equilibrium of ambiguity has been achieved when it has become true of our worship, and so of our parish life, that to admit everything is to do nothing.

Entry to the Kingdom

I hope that you do not think I am exaggerating or merely being sarcastic. There is, I am sure, something to be explained here which no analysis of our individual insufficiencies nor any analysis of our pastoral strategies can ever explain. It is, I think, the common parish experience; one which is, moreover, already anticipated in Jesus' preaching about his Kingdom and its justice. He had the habit of speaking of his Kingdom as often as not in metaphors about parties and other celebratory gatherings. But notice that there are two sorts of stories about parties which are to be found in the Gospels. One sort has to do with how to behave at a party: if you are a host, make sure you don't run out of wine; if you are a guest, don't assume that the party is in your honour when it isn't, don't be fussy about the quality of the company, don't be the sort of moraliser who can't celebrate anything without bad conscience about the poor, or the sort of killjoy who insists on etiquette to the exclusion of the pleasure of good company, and so on. But just as frequently we have stories not about how to behave at parties but about who is likely to be invited to the sort of party which is a parable of the Kingdom and its justice.

And from the evidence of Jesus' teaching it looks as if the guest-list is going to be a socialite's nightmare, so that one is forced to wonder what sort of party **could** be made out of such a mixed bunch. What is worse, when I take a look at them, the qualifications for being on the guest-list seem almost perniciously designed to exclude me. It is not going to be hardworking, honest and responsible me who is invited, but my feckless and prodigal brother. It's not going to be those who feel that they should be there by right, because they have prior engagements at other parties, it is going to be those who are so far from thinking that they have a place at the party that they have to be practically press-ganged into coming. In fact, when people noticed the sort of company Jesus tended to have parties with, they got upset - so insensitive was he equally to his own good name and to the delicate balance of well-chosen guest-lists. He tended to invite ex-prostitutes, tax-gathering agents of the imperial power (who notoriously exploited the poor for their own enrichment) as well as Sinn Feinn-like front-men for the Zealot terrorists, publicans

and any others, more or less on condition that they were sinners. His own parties altogether lacked prestige and when invited to good-class parties himself he generally made a nuisance of himself by openly commenting on their unfeeling, inhospitable and exclusive character.

Justice rooted in the Poor

Now if we remind ourselves that these are parables not just of our Eucharists but also of the justice that Jesus preached, then in view of his manifestly eccentric attitude towards the proper arrangements for a party, justice must be an exceedingly difficult and paradoxical affair for the Christian. We discover what Jesus meant by the justice of his Kingdom when we have discovered how to make a good party out of **that** lot, not when we know how to have a good party with our friends, for that is easy. Insofar as we are unable to see how a party can be made out of so unpromising a list of uncongenial types, we are unable to understand either the demands of justice, or how the Kingdom of God is to be present among us. And if we cannot understand that, then our Eucharists are a travesty; for the Eucharist **is** how the Kingdom of God is present among us.

'Recognise What You are Doing!'

It is pretty clear that in diagnosing the ills of the middle-class parish Jesus would have given not so much a theological - still less a liturgical - as a sociological analysis. To put it a little more plainly, he would have complained not so much about the conduct of our parties as about the guest-list. It is not so much a matter of what we are doing wrong at our Eucharists as who is **at** them. For there really is something terribly wrong here. It is not that **we** shouldn't be there at all; it is that **we**, who are **there**, are present with our power, social, economic, financial and educational, **unchallenged** by its consequences for the weakness and poverty of others, while all the time we celebrate in the mere rhetoric of solidarity with and justice towards just those very people whom our power oppresses. St Paul reserved some exceptionally harsh words for the Corinthian Christians who, like us, insulted the poor at their Eucharists. He said that they were thereby 'eating and drinking judgement upon themselves'. (1) Their living of the Eucharist was a kind of **lived falsification**, a kind of **objective** hypocrisy.

It is little wonder that in these circumstances the parish should end up sustaining its false position by means of unreal liturgies. In my parish, we seem to like a hymn in which we cheerfully sing that 'We're going to turn the world upside down', and though it isn't very clear what understanding of 'the world' is connected with this drastic proposal, most of our parishioners would be very shocked at the idea that it might include the British independent nuclear deterrent, or the class interests which are vested in our present levels of unemployment or the cuts in the socially necessary government expenditure. In fact, so far as I can make out, most Christians seem to be convinced that 'eating and drinking worthily' excludes the very thought of these things, except, as we have seen, in the form of calculatedly abstract gestures towards them in the Intercessory prayers.

The problem is that we have put the cart before the horse. We cannot get the link between our church life and our action for justice right by any sort of liturgical or pastoral manipulation. We know by now that it doesn't work, either liturgically or from the point of view of action for justice. The parish is the community of those who celebrate their solidarity with failure, for what they celebrate is the Cross of Christ. But if our parishes have no experience of that solidarity with failure outside of their own communities, if the 'hunger and thirst after justice' can be slaked by a mere hymn or verbal gesture, then we are posturing; we are eating our pious words rather than the Body of Christ.

The Vital Message of the Poor

For our increasingly middle-class, verbally radicalised Christian Churches there is no way out of this self-encircling trap by means of internal reforms, for there is no possibility that a Church of the rich can teach itself the significance of the 'option for the poor'. All it can do is give itself a bad conscience about its failures to make a success of something called its 'mission' to the poor - to the inner city, for that matter. I have seen it as being my job for today to remind ourselves that, if we are really serious about this business, we had better begin by realising that it is impossible to work out from what we suppose are the Church's relative successes with the comfortable and wealthy to the ever broadening population of those we betray into poverty - at any rate, that we can never do this without a sickening degree of condescension; that what we need was described by David Morland as being, on the contrary, a **reverse** mission to the rich churches of the Northern hemisphere from those who are crushed under the weight of our smug and no doubt unintentional exploitations. (2) For the Church which is today paying a heavy price for its real solidarity with the poor in a daily toll of martyrs could do without our condescension. And, as we know, it will be no excuse that we did not know what we were doing. For they are there to tell us.

The Central Mystery of Christ's Relationship with the Poor

Theologically, at least, they have made some headway with us. They have caused us to ask why it was not just an eccentricity of Jesus' character, nor even just an especially compassionate nature, but a mystery central to the reality of the Kingdom he proclaimed that Jesus preached it first to the poor, and to all others on condition that they learned to bear the experiences and burdens of poverty; or why it is that his miracles, all of which were meant as signs of his Kingdom, were mostly performed for the sick and the handicapped. And the answer to that question is at once theological, personal and political; it lies in the fact that we will make no real contact with our God, with his Kingdom, with his justice, nor even with ourselves except within our search for a just relationship with the poor. And if no other reason will do for a start, perhaps this last is the simplest and the most convincing: that we do not understand even our own humanity, that we live in a false relationship with **ourselves**, until we have found how that humanity is possessed in common with those whom poverty, economic, social racial oppression, handicap, illness, age or loneliness have stripped of all else **but** their humanity. We

find our humanity only in our **society** with such as these, for then alone do we encounter these things in ourselves.

We Neglect the Poor at Our Peril

And that is the point of Pope John Paul's moving plea at Southwark:

'Do not neglect your sick and elderly. Do not turn away from the sick and dying. Do not push them to the margins of society. For if you do you will fail to understand that they represent an important truth. The sick, the elderly, the handicapped and the dying teach us that weakness is a creative part of human living and that suffering can be embraced with no loss of dignity. Without the presence of these people in your midst you might be tempted to think of health, strength and power as the only important values to be pursued in life...)

It is therefore for very profound reasons that the discovery of God is linked with the discovery of ourselves in the search for justice, in the search for the community which **does** justice to those whose impoverishment our society first creates and then ignores. We do, perhaps, understand these connections within our personal, non-political experience. For is it not true that when we try getting through to the autistic person, then we discover how handicapped is our articulateness; when we try lifting the chaotic limbs of the spastic, then we find how clumsy is our strength; and how limiting do our refined sensitivities turn out to be when we help the incontinent with their toilet; and when we have learned to share the black person's need to throw back at us our misguided offers of help, do we not discover from what height of advantage we offered it?

'Evacuated Piety' or Lived Expression of Faith?

But there is, in addition, a politics and economics of all this, without which it has all become but an evacuated piety. Of course, it is precisely the politics and economics of all this which is the hardest thing for Christians to accept and probably the easiest thing they will be asked this year to give up for Lent. Christianity has acquired, mainly I think from long habits of compromise with the individualism of the market society, an individualism all its own, the chief mark of which is to be profoundly inhibiting politically. But, for all that, there is an inseparably economic and political dimension to the option for the poor and the first step towards realising this, is to put the horse back before the cart. Let us at least realise what the situation is. For all the increasingly popular middle-class rhetoric about options for the poor, we are not going to get across that boundary which divides the pew from politics by shouting the words of it ever more loudly from pulpit to the pew. There is very little we can do to heave the church-bound into the real world, and if we Christians truly are to turn the world upside down we might make a start by turning our churches the right way up themselves. In fact we must truly stop worrying about the Church at all. For the Church is subordinate to its **mission**.

Mission of the Church within the Poor

And that mission is terribly simple, at once overtly political and profoundly

spiritual. It is not normally that of initiating, even less usually that of organising, and never that of dictating to the struggle for justice in our world; but it is that of **indentification** with that struggle for justice which is to be found already within the world, embodied in those inchoate remnants of human community which can be retrieved from within the destructive anarchy of our class society. It is within the struggle for justice that the Church finds itself; for its mission is to piece together into an **ekklesia**, those remnants, those fragmentary signs of human community-in-the-making which are already there in our despoiled world. They are there in what is left of our social services, in the self-organisation of the black and other ethnic minorities, in the sound of those few voices which are left to protest at and organise against the scandals of unemployment, discriminatory housing policies, the blatant harassment of ethnic communities by the forces of law and order, at the general erosions of human rights and of labour organisation, and so on. It is of these that the Church is the sacrament, for it points to a depth within these struggling, emergent fragments of a justice, to a depth which could not be suspected until they are celebrated within the significance of the death and resurrection of Christ. But of course, to take up the significance of **these** signs of human community, the Church may very well have to erode the significance of itself as the established, entrenched ecclesial community which it is. To be, as the second Vatican Council put it, 'the sign and sacrament of the unity of all men', (3) it may have to cease to play at being an already achieved community of **itself**.

The Cost of that Mission

The proposal, therefore, that Christians seek justice in the world through their seeking to make society with those whom the world rejects is an overtly subversive proposal, not in some higher spiritual sense which is 'above' politics, but **because** it is subversive spiritually, it is also subversive politically, economically, socially and, be it not forgotten, ecclesiastically. For we are now truly talking about turning the **world** upside down, about a reversal of assumptions and priorities and of entrenched economic and political structures, about a reversal of these things which could not be contained within our present economic and political assumptions. We are therefore talking about commitments within which the spiritual and the political are so fused as to be revolutionary. For they are commitments which cut deeper and wider into the social tissue than do the concerns of the politicians who will resent these commitments of the Church, because they reverse their assumptions too. They amount to a refusal to play **their** political game, as refuse it we must. **Theirs** is the game of power, and the one thing which Christians may not do is seek power in the name of the Gospel, even when tempted by the opportunities to do good which that power seems to afford.

For we seek not an association with power, but a society with the weak; and we want no privilege or prestige, nor any relevance but that revolutionary relevance of the refusal of power, the refusal to play the game, which ultimately brought Jesus to death on what had to be and was a political charge. We are told that we too, if we take the message seriously, will be despised. And I end with such consolation as can be found in that fine remark of Herbert McCabe's: that if we do not love we are not alive; but if we do love, we will

be killed. For that is the price to be paid for proclaiming the good news to the poor.

NOTES

- (1) I Cor., 11, 29**
- (2) Cf The Eucharist and Justice, published by the RC Commission for International Justice and Peace, London, 1981**
- (3) Constitution on The Church, § 1**

CHAPTER 2

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME — Eric James

The subject I've been given, (or, rather, allocated - I was not consulted of course; pople don't consult the **older** clergy these days!) "The Spirit of The Lord is Upon Me", depends a lot on how I conceive of the Spirit of the Lord - and indeed, how I conceive of myself. I do not myself think of the Holy Spirit as a kind of separate 'individual', so to speak, who can be given to another separate individual; and I doubt if anyone saw a dove descending on me as I came into St Paul's. (I did in fact see a pigeon, but I moved away quickly!)

The Corporate nature of the Holy Spirit

The defect of so many of our images and pictures of the Spirit is that they are entirely individualistic; whereas surely the distinctive thing about the New Testament is that the Spirit becomes a shared possession of the whole people of God. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came only upon certain outstanding individuals - prophets, kings, craftsmen, and so on. In the New Testament **all the Lord's people** are prophets; the Spirit is poured out on the whole Church, on every Tom, Dick and, as they say these days, Mary; the Spirit belongs to the whole body of Christ and to every individual by virtue of his or her membership of it. The Community of the Holy Spirit, the **Koinonia** or common ownership of the Holy Spirit, was the distinctive, thrilling announcement of the New Age. It was the great new fact that made the Apostolic Church the infectious dynamic reality that it was. But I want to begin what I have to say with another description of the Spirit of the Lord, which comes from John Keble's great Whitsuntide hymn, in which he says:

"It fills the Church of God; it fills
The sinful world around;
Only in stubborn hearts and wills
No place for it is found."

That verse might really be my text for today, because I want to talk of the Holy Spirit and the origins of something I'm particularly concerned with at the moment: the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. I want to talk of it as emanating, in my experience of the Holy Spirit, as much from outside the structures of the Church as within it. And I hope you'll forgive my being autobiographical first of all, in order to make one or two points.

Personal Roots'

My parents lived in the heart of London's inner city, in Camden Town, north of Euston - Mum was born in Camden Town, next to the Bedford Music Hall; and Dad, a few streets away. They were both Welsh Presbyterians who worshipped with other Presbyterians (mostly Scottish, because of being close to Euston Station) in a Chapel - which is now a furniture store. The Chapel choir and the preachers and the amateur dramatics at that Chapel formed the centre of a club-like existence which gave them a vivid experience of community, and separated the Church from, and enabled them to cope with, the

frightening inner-city life that surrounded them in that Camden Town/Euston area in the 1880's and 1890's. When I was a child, many of our evenings were filled with Mum's and Dad's reminiscences of that Chapel; and they obviously loved it very much. In the main, it was a lower middle-class tradesmen's club in a working-class area (I am trying to describe it accurately - not knock it), and I want to suggest that belonging and believing were inseparable there as they are in most Church situations. I might go further to say that belonging was more important than believing. No one can take seriously the question of the Church and the inner city without taking that combination seriously. In fact, there is a whole sub-committee of the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas devoted just to that subject. I was in Liverpool last week - I'm going to be there again this evening - and I've been struck by the fact that the Liverpool Irish Catholics still go to church, while French Catholics in France do not. And it illustrates my point: belonging as Irishmen to a kind of immigrant Irishmen's club keeps them going to church.

Belonging and believing.

To go back to my parents, their Chapel gave them their morals and their respectability in a kind of Dickensian inner-city world of prostitutes, alcoholics and collective violence. They kept their good language in what they saw as a world of bad language. They saw salvation in the way the Chapel took them out of the fairly awful world that surrounded them. We had descriptions of that awful world as children - "Eric, if you only knew," they would say; and I loved to hear the stories. They saw salvation as the eventual escape altogether from the inner city - to better housing, doing the best for their children by way of education and health. Again, I'm not knocking them; it's reality; and there's a real question there of staying for salvation or getting out for salvation; being saved within or being saved by an exodus; belonging to the Chapel and believing, versus belonging to Camden Town. It's another important area of inner-city questioning that concerns our Commission very much: how much we ought to encourage people, clergy and laity, ordinary people, to stay where they are and work it out there, or get out for the sake of the kids. There are a lot of ghettos left after people who get on, get out. My parents moved out ten miles to "Paradise", which is called Dagenham. "They looked for a City" and found it in the privately-owned houses in a part of Dagenham where, as I said, they could do their best for their children, as all good parents want to do. They became, Methodists in Dagenham because there was no Presbyterian church there. The denominations are irrelevant in such circumstances; belonging is much more important than believing; and when the Methodist Church closed down we became C of E. Actually we became Low Church C of E, then High Church C of E, as the result of what was called 'dual patronage'. As vicars came and went, our sanctuary lamps were alternately full of dust and full of oil - but that didn't really matter too much, because there was the club church to go to. The church choir became my club, and it never occurred to me that my school friends in Dagenham lacked anything because their lives were not centred on the local church. They had different club, like the Dog-Track, on which they centred theirs; but it was all the same sort of thing really. It was a place to find some sense of belonging in a welter of population.

I left school when I was fourteen at the beginning of the War - the Second World War, - and went to work at a Riverside Wharf on the Thames. At first I was an office boy; after seven years I was Manager:- and it was a huge education. I lunched with the men most days in the Crane Box, but did my work under four bosses who were Freemasons, who turned up when they wanted to and went off, of an evening with black market wines and dried fruit. They did not take much interest in the firm or the wharf workers. They were concerned only with their profits. Almost all the men lived in Bermondsey, and in fire-watching during the Blitz I got to know their homes a good deal. All of those workers were a million miles from the life of the Church. The Church was doing marvellous work in the area, in Bermondsey, in little club churches in little religious pockets of different sorts: High, Low, Non-Conformist, Roman Catholic. But most of the life of the world went on a million miles away. That doesn't mean to say that some of the kids weren't baptised. But that wasn't the only way the Spirit of the Lord was being given. It had been given to me in a particular sort of way, because at fourteen I was clearly a gifted young man musically, and was organist at the local parish church - that was my club. So when I went out to work, I also began learning the organ at Southwark Cathedral, three hundred yards away from where I worked; and at lunch-times and in the evenings I walked out of the wharf world into the church world. The theory was that one was the world of the Spirit, and the other another sort of world. But that was not my experience. It was simply the experience of different sorts of corporateness. I got tremendous friendship and support and fun from the wharf world; I loved it and my friends there. And when I went to play the organ at the cathedral, it was part of a different sort of world. For years I didn't meet anyone there. Not many people went there in those days. I would pop in, play the organ, and pop out again. I loved the organ and I loved the wharf; but they were two worlds; I went from the work club to the church club. Most people seem to assume that there's different intellectual beliefs and convictions separating the two worlds, but that didn't accord with my experience. It was much more a matter of two different sorts of belonging, decorated by a kind of top surface of different beliefs and practices.

After seven years at the wharf, I went to evening classes at King's College, London and began learning Latin and Greek and Hebrew and so on, so that - the theory was - I could be a priest to the kind of people I'd been working alongside. And you had to learn Latin and Greek and Hebrew to do that. Let it be clear that I had no doubt that I was getting ordained in order to go back to be a priest to the Bermondsey people, to the masses of ordinary people in South London. I was a curate under a brilliant vicar who became, as all brilliant vicars do, a bishop. He became Bishop of Guilford, then Bishop of Salisbury in a parish the north of which consisted of admirals, generals, MPs and civil servants and the south, rehoused slums. Never were the rehoused slums more assiduously visited, especially by the curates. We baptised people's babies if they wanted them baptised, and prepared them most carefully for baptism, and, later, marriage. We visited them when they were bereaved. But it was the admirals, generals and civil servants who came to the church; it was their kind of club. No matter how hard we visited them, the rehoused slums stayed away - it simply wasn't theirs.

Power Structures in Church and State

For four years after my curacy I served as Chaplain to Trinity College, Cambridge. Chapel was relatively well-attended - it was during the religious boom. The undergraduates and chapel-goers were, in the main, the sons of the kind of civil servants, and so on, who had lived in the north of the parish where I had been a curate; and while I was there I learned, amongst other things, something about the power structure of England. Several of my undergraduates are now MPs, one or two in the Cabinet - there isn't a Trinity man who is an MP other than for the Conservative Party, of course. In very many places of power in British society today a Trinity College, Cambridge man will probably be found - who would almost certainly have gone up to Trinity from his public school: William Whitelaw, John Nott, Leon Brittain, Enoch Powell, and so on. But I learned a lot about the power structure that governs the Church as well as the State - or should I say the State as well as the Church? - and how it affects the people, the masses of people, who have relatively little power in either system. Twenty-five years ago, after my four years at Trinity, I returned to South London, to the monochrome working-class parish at Camberwell that Trinity had adopted as its Mission in 1880. The church there had been built to house 1,750 people in 1824. The parish, as I was told (you can never tell in areas like that - or this) consisted of about 15,000 people; but never did more than 100 people come to church on any Sunday of which I was its Vicar. You may well say you're not surprised. The building's closed now. The back broke; it needed £11,000 to repair it, so it was shut down, vandalised, and that was that. If it had been in Bedford, where I worked later, the £11,000 would have been raised within a few months. But because it was in South London - the most valuable historical building in the area - it was shut down. The tiny congregation now meets in the school: which is a benefit, because it hasn't got a vast monolithic structure to keep all its people occupied. I regard that church there as a brave little club, and I don't use the word in a bad sense; it does a superb job in an alien world.

The seeds of the Archbishop's Commission

If the Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, what have I been doing for the last twenty-five years? I ask myself. And I'm not going to say anything more about that, except that the one consuming subject for me all along has been the gap between the Church and the masses, the working-class people of our land. When the Brixton Riots took place, I found myself made very angry by the Religious Correspondent of the *Times* - Clifford Longley - who wrote an article in which he said how all was well with the Church of England; and I sat down and wrote this letter:

"Your Religious Affairs Correspondent assures us that all manner of things are well with the Church of England. It would be foolish, churlish and unthankful to fly in the face of the facts he quotes. But there is one central and crucial area in which the prophets were tragically right and which, astonishingly, Clifford Longley ignores: the relation of the Church of England to the vast inner city areas of our land. It will not be long, for instance, before there are only half the full-time clergy in places like Bermondsey, Rotherhithe, Woolwich, Southwark and Camberwell that

there were in 1966, and this policy of withdrawal from the inner city has been forced upon the leaders of the Church of England, not only in South London, by many and complex factors - finance, manpower, the problems of a mainly middle-class and married clergy in relating to working-class areas in terms of education of children etc. Whatever the reasons, the fact of the withdrawal is undeniable. It would, of course, be foolish to judge a Church simply by where it places its full-time manpower, especially with all the moves towards new patterns of ministry, except for the fact that the full-time clergy are still, for better and worse, the thermostat of the life of the Church of England. I should myself like to see the immediate appointment of an Archbishop's Commission to report within a year. It would report on the Church's strategy for the inner city and would need of course to consider the theology and spirituality of the Church in the inner city, not just finance and manpower. I make this suggestion not least in admiration for the work of the clergy and laity and their wives, whose commitments to the inner city - not least in places like Brixton - has remained unshaken. I make it because Clifford Longley's statistics are in the main the statistics of a Church in suburban captivity, and by and large a suburban Church is satisfied so long as its suburban statistics are healthy. I make it because I have never swerved from the conviction that a Church that failed in the inner-city areas of our great cities is a Church that has failed."

How the Commission works

I sent a copy of that letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, because he had been my bishop for a while in St. Albans, and a friend since he was in Cambridge at the same time that I was. I said that I really wanted a reply, and I got a good letter back, saying 'Give me six months'. Almost to the day, six months later, he asked me to go and see the Urban Bishops of the C of E at their meeting to put the idea of a Commission to them and reason it out. So I did. I didn't feel I'd done very well; I came away from the meeting very depressed, thinking, 'Well, that's another failure to mark up, James'. But in fact they were more impressed than I thought. The Commission was appointed, and has got going; and it is to my mind a very good Commission - more than I could have dared to hope - and a good gang of people; and it's getting on with its work. It met all day yesterday in London for instance. And I want just to say a few words about how it's going about its work, because I think it very important that you should see that it's not some gang of boffins up in London, but something you may yourself want to contribute to.

The Meeting is composed of busy people who have to make some sacrifice to get it into their time-table. It's a very varied gang, with academic people, a housewife, black people as well as white people, and white people as well as black people; and its got people of different denominations on it, though it's not claiming to be an Ecumenical Commission. (We want to confront Church of England powers like the Church Commissioners, and if you're ecumenical in trying to hit them all you often hit none of them) It's chaired by Sir Richard O'Brien, Head of the Manpower Services Commission until the Prime Minister sacked him - which may of course be the highest accolade he has ever received, and Bishop David Sheppard is the Vice-Chairman. It has divided itself up

into sub-committees because it couldn't possibly work with eighteen people together the whole time, and while we hold some of our meetings in London we also try to go round visiting all the main inner-city areas of the country - Liverpool, Manchester, the North East, and so on.

The first sub-committee's task is to consider 'The Future Shape of Ministry', which includes questions of resources, manpower, money and building and what's to happen to them. When Leslie Paul made his report on the Church of England, he said that the clergy are where the people aren't; and that still remains true. The clergy in this country are not deployed where the people, the masses of people are, but where the church buildings, or rather more, the parishes are; and in spite of all that's been done between Leslie Paul's report and now, this is overwhelmingly still the case. But I don't think the answer is going to be found by simply transferring clergy from one area to another. The main question is not even how you recruit more clergy. What is particularly on our conscience is how you get ordinary working-class people to minister within their own situation - which goes back to my text: and how in the Spirit everybody in the body of Christ is helped to minister. I'd like to return for a moment to what I was saying autobiographically: I found it very difficult when I was working in Southwark to imagine the kind of Church which would be appropriate to the chaps who worked with me at my riverside wharf. It's a very difficult question to answer, our Church is so naturally middle-class in all its ways. It's very difficult to imagine a Church which would be absolutely **natural**, as natural to the people working on the riverside wharves as the "Army and Navy" pub in Long Lane Bermondsey. So that in our consideration of the future shape of the ministry and future resources, this is the number one question; and we've been much helped by the information - which we don't receive uncritically - which is coming to us from abroad, in particular from South America, on how the Church there is raising up communities of ordinary working people. The whole world of what is nowadays called 'Liberation Theology' is very relevant indeed to the work of our Commission, and though, as I say, we don't receive it uncritically with regard to either its biblical interpretations or its more structural ideas, we do find it has a great deal to say to us.

The second sub-committee is dealing with the subject of believing: what do Christians believe, in places like Stepney in London? I'm already aware that it's very different to what they believe in Liverpool. I was in Glasgow last week, and Glasgow is a Catholic city - surprisingly to me - more like Liverpool than Bristol. But what do people believe, working-class people in different cities? Is there a folk religion they still adhere to? Which brings up the whole question of belief: of whether our belief is primarily an intellectual one, of whether the intellectual element can be left out; or whether people are capable of a far more intellectual response than we sometimes credit them with. All that subject's very difficult. When we see the extremely intellectual capabilities of, for instance, Trades Union leaders, why do we so often assume that people from places like inner-city areas are intellectually less capable? All that relates of course to the subject of training.

The third sub-committee is on wealth creation and poverty creation, employment and unemployment. The Commission is not just a commission on the

inner city; it's a commission on the kind of Church that **allows** the inner-city Church to exist in the way it does, and the kind of society, the kind of world society, that allows similar situations to exist not only here but in Calcutta as well. It's a commission on the big forces that create employment and unemployment, poverty and riches, and what the Church has to say about them. The next sub-committee - with an intentional reversal of the normal expression - is on "Order and Law"; and on Racism and Vandalism. I don't want you to think for a moment that inner cities are the only criminal areas. Fraud went up by 52% last year in the City of London, making it clearly an area of criminal capacity - but no one notices. People point to Brixton and say, 'That's where you get muggings, that's really a crime area.' But if you commit it in pin-stripes (I don't mean mugging, I mean crime!) I don't imagine anyone would know. It wouldn't be immediately observed.

Our last section is on the Welfare State; not just the statutory side, the voluntary side as well; all that goes toward health, education, social services; what the situation is at the moment, and how the Church can possibly relate to the facts themselves in the inner city. I leave you with the challenge we are confronting: how the Church can face the nation with the hard question of getting rid of Two Nations, and creating a compassionate society of which we can be proud.

CHAPTER 3

THE LORD'S YEAR OF FAVOUR: JUBILEE. Kenneth Leech

Proclamation of Jubilee

June 20th 1886 was the Jubilee of the accession of Queen Victoria; and it was also Trinity Sunday, the great Christian festival of equality and sharing within the Godhead. And in striking contrast to the mass of sentimentality which always gushes from the media in jubilees, the following words appeared in the **Church Reformer**, the journal of the Guild of St Matthew, edited by Stewart Headlam¹:

The Queen's Jubilee is good; but the People's Jubilee is better. Why may not the year upon which we now enter be the Jubilee of both Queen and People? For the Jubilee of the Hebrews, as ordained by the great statesman, whom God for their deliverance raised up and inspired, was the Jubilee of a whole people; and its observance was founded upon, and was expressly designed to conserve, a divinely ordained system of Land Nationalisation.

It went on to speak of the Jubilee call for liberty:

'Liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof': that is the ideal of the true Year of Jubilee. Liberty to the wage slaves; liberty to the landless English labourers; liberty to the landlord-ridden Irish people; restoration to the disinherited of their share in the land which the Lord their God giveth them, and of which the injustice of their brother man has despoiled them.

1886: Headlam and his comrades stood within a long tradition going back to the prophets of Israel, which saw in the symbol of the Year of Jubilee a pointer to a transformed society based upon human freedom and social equality. Now in this lecture I want to attempt three things. First, and for the major part of it, to examine the theme of the Jubilee, the 'favourable year of the Lord' in Scripture, and especially in the Nazareth sermon recorded in St Luke, Chapter 4. Secondly, to reflect on the meaning of this theme in relation to our understanding of the Gospel. And then, thirdly, to suggest some consequences of the Jubilee for our approach to issues of social and political justice today, particularly as they relate to the problems of urban society.

Biblical Jubilee

First, the biblical teaching. If we are to make sense of Jesus' words in Luke 4 about the 'favourable year of the Lord', we need to go back to the Year of Jubilee in the Book of Leviticus. For

There can ... be little argument that the language and imagery of the jubilee year stand behind the reading and proclamation of Jesus in Nazareth.²

The proclamation of the Year of Jubilee occurs within the framework of the Law of Moses, with its concern for equality, for fair treatment for the poor, the alien, the orphan and the widow, for slaves, and for a true respect for the land. The crucial passage is Leviticus 25: 8—12:

You shall count seven sabbaths of years, that is seven times seven years, forty-nine years, and in the seventh month on the tenth day of the month, on the Day of Atonement, you shall send the ram's horn round. You shall send it through all your land to sound a blast, and so you shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberation in the land for all its inhabitants. You shall make this your year of jubilee. Every man of you shall return to his patrimony, every man to his family. The fiftieth year shall be your jubilee. (NEB)

The return of property is the only feature which is unique to the Year of Jubilee, and it is based on the principal, the biblical principal, that land cannot be permanently sold because land belongs to God. 'No land shall be sold outright, because the land is mine, and you are coming into it as aliens and settlers' (Leviticus 25: 23). This principle runs right throughout the Old Testament, linked with a second principle, that the land is to be shared: 'The profit of the earth is for all' (Ecclesiastes 5: 9, AV).

Linked with the restoration of the land were two other features, the cancellation of debts and the setting free of hired workers; while associated with the Jubilee were care for the poor (Lev. 25: 35) and the prohibition of interest within the community of Israel (Lev. 25: 36-8). The setting free of hired workers and the cancelling of debts also took place in the Sabbath year, the seventh year (Exodus 21: 2), and in fact the Year of Jubilee was simply 'a heightened and intensified Sabbath year'³ Thus the Year of Jubilee involved a threefold liberation: the setting free of the workers; the cancelling of debts; and the restoration of the land to its original owners. For the people of Israel, the Jubilee was a time of restoration. 'Man and nature are to be restored to the idyllic dignity and social equality which existed at the time of the tribal federation'⁴

Social equality was seen as basic to human dignity. It was seen that an unequal society inevitably leads to the denial and destruction of human dignity. This theme of the Jubilee is used in Second Isaiah as a symbol of the coming redemption, the time when bondage is ended and penalties are paid (Isaiah 40: 2). Isaiah 58: 6—12 is particularly important here with its call to 'loose the fetters of injustice, to untie the knots of the yoke, to snap every yoke and set free those who have been crushed' (58: 6). Ironically, it's this chapter which is read by the clergy every Ash Wednesday - the day on which they were urged by one Conservative Member of Parliament to give up politics for Lent. This chapter also was used at Yom Kippur to inaugurate the Year of Jubilee⁵. And, of course, Isaiah 61, the passage used by Jesus at Nazareth, announces 'liberty to captives and release to those in prison ... a year of the Lord's favour' (61: 2). But the Year of Jubilee was more than an act of social reform. It was a religious act, a liturgy, a celebration of God's Kingdom and God's rule over the earth. The Year was heralded by, and took its name from the **yobel**, the ram's horn, the horn which had brought down the walls of Jericho (Exodus 19: 13; Joshua 6: 5). It was in a sense the internal equivalent

of the Exodus. Just as in the Exodus God had liberated his people from bondage and external oppression, so in the Jubilee God liberated them from bondage and internal oppression.

Now in the period immediately prior to the time of Christ the theme of the Year of Jubilee was highly popular among the Essenes, and the discovery in 1956 of one of the Qumran scrolls, a scroll known as 11Q Melchisedek, throws considerable light on its use at this time. This document is a commentary on Isaiah 61. It envisages a final, eschatological Jubilee, and it sees the shadowy figure of Melchisedek as inaugurating a time of vengeance upon the oppressors of the people of God: The theological importance of this scroll lies in its clear association between the Messiah and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It is the first piece of conclusive evidence we have of this, and the fact that it is set within the framework of the Year of Jubilee adds weight to the view that this was the framework within which the preaching of Jesus took place⁶.

Jesus' Messianic Jubilee

And so we come to the Nazareth sermon recorded in Luke 4, in which Jesus outlines what one writer has called 'the Messianic programme'⁷. He uses the well-known words from Isaiah 61, though significantly omitting the reference to the day of vengeance and replacing it with words from Isaiah 58: 6, 'to let the broken victims go free'. He uses a Greek term, *aphesis*, release, a word which in the Greek Old Testament is associated almost exclusively with the Year of Jubilee⁸. 'This word represents doubtless the primary theological and verbal connection with, and reference to, the Levitical proclamation of Jubilee'⁹. He speaks also, following Isaiah 61, of the release of prisoners, *aichmalōtoi*, who were certainly in the Old Testament context more the victims of economic poverty than prisoners in the strict sense¹⁰.

The Jubilee context of this Nazareth sermon was recognised by many older commentaries on St Luke, such as that of Alfred Plummer in 1896¹¹. In recent years there's been a major revival of interest in the political aspects of Luke's account¹², and, to my knowledge, at least three doctoral theses have been produced since 1977 on the place of the Year of Jubilee in the ministry of Jesus¹³. But it was the publication in 1972 of a book by John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*¹⁴, which brought the issue of the Year of Jubilee and its influence on the New Testament to the attention of a wider Christian public. Yoder's book is a strong and well-documented rejection of the individualistic interpretation of the ministry of Jesus. In common with all New Testament scholarship in recent years, he sees the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God as the heart of Jesus' message. But he goes on to argue that this was linked with the proclamation of the Year of Jubilee, involving 'a visible socio-political economic restructuring of relations among the people of God'¹⁵. The Nazareth sermon is a summary of Jesus' mission. The Sermon on the Plain in Luke Chapter 6 (12ff) spells out the socio-economic consequences, the ethic of the new order which by its nature constitutes a challenge to the powers that be. The Lord's Prayer, with its clause 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors', is, Yoder claims, a Jubilee prayer, in which liberation from debt is seen as the beginning of a new hope for the poor, a

new age. The centrality of debt as a paradigm of social evil is brought out in the parables where the merciless servant (Matthew 18: 23-5) is condemned for not cancelling the debt, while the unjust steward (Luke 16: 1-13), that casualty of so many sermons, is actually commended **because** he forgave debts, as the Jubilee ordinance instructed him to do. Yoder sums up his argument in these words:¹⁶

The two parables of the merciless servant and the unfaithful steward thus confirm what the Nazareth discourse, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sermon on the Mount had already given us to understand. It is really a jubilee, conformed to the sabbatical instructions of Moses, that Jesus proclaimed in AD 26: a jubilee able to resolve the social problem in Israel, by abolishing debts and liberating debtors whose insolvency had reduced them to slavery. The practice of such a jubilee was not optional. It belonged to the precursor signs of the Kingdom. Those who would refuse to enter this path could not enter into the Kingdom of God.

I believe that Yoder's case is a very strong one. But whether or not we are talking about an actual declaration by Jesus of a Jubilee Year, there is no doubt that the Year of Jubilee was a guiding motif of the ministry of Jesus. I want therefore to ask: if this is the case, that we can only understand the preaching and ministry of Jesus against the background of the proclamation of the Year of Jubilee, what does this mean for our understanding of the Gospel today?

1980's Appropriation of Jubilee

Well, first, and very clearly, it means that we must reject as unorthodox and unbiblical the view, currently being promoted by Margaret Thatcher, Edward Norman, **The Times** newspaper and others, that Christianity is essentially to do with individual salvation, that it is essentially private, and that concerns for social justice, for economic and political change and for the defence of the poor, are some alien leftist distortion of the Gospel. On the contrary, it is those who ignore these biblical demands who have forsaken biblical faith for a mutant of gnosticism, the oldest and most persistent and most harmful of all the heresies. The quest for social justice and for human equality is endemic to the biblical view of salvation. The law and the prophets, which Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil, are obsessed with the themes of justice and social equality¹⁷. A church which takes seriously the proclamation of the favourable year of the Lord must recognise that human freedom, economic justice and social equality were basic features of that year. Those who want to reduce Christianity to a personal faith, with the occasional act of charitable giving, come under the condemnation of those who pay tithes of mint and rue and every garden herb but ignore the weightier matters of the law (Luke 11: 42).

Secondly, the Jubilee is part of a deep concern throughout the law and the prophets for the poor and the downtrodden, whose very existence violates the divine justice. In its origin, salvation is biased to the poor and the needy. On the other hand, throughout the biblical record, and throughout the writings of the early Christian fathers, wealth and riches are seen as an impediment to

salvation. The Old Testament in fact frequently associates riches with injustice, and only ever mentions profit in order to condemn it. The Year of Jubilee was part of a whole complex of law which was concerned to protect the poor, control the greedy and the profiteers, and restore equality of access to the land which was God's gift to all his people. As Frederick Verrinder wrote in 1885:¹⁸

The principle which underlies the Mosaic agrarian legislation is absolutely fatal to what we know as landlords. Jehovah is the only landlord: the land is his because he and none other created it; all men are his tenants.

Charles Dalmon expressed the same point in a hymn (sung to the tune of 'We plough the fields and scatter') which was much loved of Anglican socialists in the 1920's and is still sung by the Jubilee Group: 19

God is the only Landlord
To whom our rents are due.
He made the earth for everyone
And not for just a few.
The four parts of creation -
Earth, water, air and fire -
God made and ranked and stationed
For everyone's desire.

If we put together the integral link between salvation and justice, and the biblical concern for the poor and the oppressed, it is clear that those Christians today who work for a just society and who take sides against those who grind the faces of the poor are doing so on a clear biblical mandate. Indeed, as the American Evangelical writer Jim Wallis has written, in his book **Agenda for Biblical People**: 20

That God is on the side of the poor and that the Scriptures are uncompromising in their demand for economic and social justice is much more clear biblically than are most of the issues over which churches have divided. The Scriptures claim that to know God is to do justice and to plead the cause of the oppressed. Yet this central imperative is one of the first to be purged from a church that has conformed and made accommodations to the established order.

Which brings me to my final section.

Presuppositions for Modern Jubilee

What kind of directions are demanded of a society which seeks to move towards, and prepare the ground for, the Jubilee? What kind of directions are demanded of a church which wishes to take that proclamation seriously? Let me say at the outset that I do not think that it is possible to move directly and simplistically from the Book of Leviticus - or even from the teachings of Jesus - straight to the needs of British or world society in 1984. A major intervening task of translation and application is necessary. But that is not to say that there are not certain directions which are demanded by the Jubilee, and others which move diametrically against it.

I want to make two preliminary observations here. The first is that I do not personally think it is possible, within a capitalist economic order, to move in a Jubilee direction at all without a major social revolution, because the conditions and presuppositions of the Year of Jubilee are totally contrary to the basic premises on which capitalism works. The Year of Jubilee proclaims freedom from debt, liberation for captives, and the restoration of the land to the people. Capitalist society necessitates the existence of a class of poor and unemployed people, depends upon prison and internment for subversives, and is rooted in the private ownership of wealth and of land. There is therefore in my view a fundamental conflict between biblical and capitalist values which cannot be overcome by a little goodwill and reform here and there. The Jubilee is about quality. We live under a government which is committed - and says it is committed - to inequality, to the maintenance of inequality and, where necessary, to the restoration of inequality.

Secondly, I think that the Church, as a minority group within western society, cannot itself bring about fundamental change. What it can do is decide where its own duty lies. It cannot, for example, for ever talk about a 'bias to the poor' when it is itself dependent for its survival on the rich, and on the support and approval of the rich. However, while the Church is a minority, it is an extremely wealthy and powerful minority, and its actions and its interests will speak more loudly than its words.

For example, the Year of Jubilee is about liberation from debt. Today many thousands of people are in debt because of financial policies. Entire cities are in financial crisis. In Scripture, debt is seen as a primary social evil. This only survives in the Church of England today in the quaint requirement that clearance of debts is still a condition of ordination. It seems to me that Christians who are committed to the Jubilee must seek to make connections between their theology and their support, for example, for the low-paid, for those suffering from fuel poverty, for those inequitably taxed. In Britain today, as no doubt Professor Townsend will say next week, there is a growing community of people who, through lack of money, are cruelly deprived - deprived of proper health care, of proper education, of any real access to the power structures. In one sense 1984 is worse, far worse, than Orwell thought it would be. At least Winston Smith was considered important enough to be surveyed and scrutinised. In the era of Big Sister, the little people can go to the wall without scrutiny. The debts are mounting. So we need to ask if the Church is willing to stick its neck out, to open its mouth for the dumb and to speak out on behalf of the poor and the destitute.

Secondly, the Jubilee Year is about captivity. It is about deliverance for captives. Today, captivity is the stable condition of thousands of people who are deprived of choice, deprived of hope for the future. Increasingly, the policing of our society is seen in political terms, as an ideological tool to be used against those who seek to defend their right to work or, in some places, their right to think and to speak.

In a society in which the national media is controlled from one side, and one-third of it controlled now by one man, the Year of Jubilee stands as an unpublicised trumpet of protest for freedom and for truth. 'Let the oppressed

go free' is hardly a comfortable message for 1984 Britain with its ominous shift towards an authoritarian and repressive state. So we need to ask: is the Church willing to come to the defence of those unjustly imprisoned, of those vilified and pilloried for their views?

Crucial Land Factor

Thirdly, and finally, the land. The central and unique feature of the Year of Jubilee was its directive that all acquired land should in the fiftieth year be returned to its original owners. It recognised that the question of who owns and controls the land was basic to social equality. In our society, inequality is determined by wealth and property. And this deep-rooted inequality has not been significantly altered - nor will it be - by taxation alone. The concentration of wealth in Britain, and again I'm trespassing on next week's subject, has not significantly changed in our society over a century. The fundamental theological point of the Year of Jubilee was that the land belongs to God, and that there is no right of absolute ownership. In a lecture in 1977 Archbishop Michael Ramsey put the point very simply. He said: 21

The land is not something which man has produced with materials which God has given him. The land is a part of the earth made by God. It is impossible to speak of the created world without speaking of land. The created world consists of land. Thus it seems to me a fairly clear theological principle, and social teaching emerging from it, that 'God gave the land to the people', and that any monopolising of land is wrong. That seems to me to be good theology and good Christian social teaching.

However, this does present a major problem for the Church of England which owns more land than most institutions in the country. Can this Church with any credibility speak of a bias to the poor, or plead the plight of the homeless, without beginning to put its own house in order? Can it honestly sound the trumpet for the Year of Jubilee? I wish I could answer 'Yes', but my honest answer is 'I doubt it'. In 1967 in the preface to the English edition of **Capital**, Karl Marx wrote that the Church of England would rather forfeit 38 of its 39 Articles than one-thirty-ninth of its income.

His words abide. And until the issue of the Church's alliance with Mammon is faced, Archbishops' Commissions on Urban Priority Areas will be of no avail whatever. Because the prior question is to do with the Church's own Priority Areas.

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CHAPTER 4

TO THE BLIND NEW SIGHT

THE GROWTH OF POVERTY IN BRITAIN - PETER TOWNSEND

My theme is that of **growing poverty** in Britain, and in this city of Bristol. What I want to do is to trace some of the problems of the extent of poverty, the ways in which that problem is growing, and how in some illustrative **senses** it applies immediately to our concerns in Bristol. Then I will reflect with you about what I hope will be a common concern: how to arrest present trends and endeavour to reverse them.

Of course, right at the start we have a problem about the assertion, or, as I believe is correct to say, the generalisation, that poverty is growing in our society. We do have to reflect on how we define "need" - what income we feel people require to live on, for themselves, for members of their families, in an advanced industrial society. And although it is not my job today to go into the subtleties of what we mean by 'human needs', I would want to try and put to you that we should not comprehend this solely in terms of hunger or starvation, because while hunger and starvation represent a very primary need for the whole of human kind there are many other needs, even in Third World countries, which have to be met if people are to fulfil the expectations of the laws of their societies, and if they are to fulfil the expectations and demands of members of their families and their communities.

We have to be reminded of the **relativity** of human needs as history moves on. We are living in a society which is every day creating fresh conditions, fresh laws, fresh expectations, whether on the part of professional people like doctors, school teachers or administrators, or whether in terms of new legislation such as the compulsory wearing of seat-belts - these are examples of the new demands which are being placed upon us. In some important respects we shall have to measure people's needs, including their financial needs, today in the 1980's, in relation to the structure of present-day society rather than on standards drawn from the history of our own upbringing, our own childhood, our own youth. Obviously we have an interest in how far conditions of life and living standards have changed, and we all want to have some measure of progress. Equally we shall have to become much more sensitive than I think many people are today to the new demands and pressures of present-day society, and that includes the kind of income we need to meet our obligations as workers, as people who are members of a community, in relation to our families, and so forth.

To illustrate this theme, of the relativity of need, which applies to studies of any single society - I will refer to some of the interviewing I have undertaken. A great deal of my interviewing experience has been with elderly people, interviewing samples of elderly people both in their own homes and in institutions, but also with a large number of disabled people of younger ages too. As a matter of course, people try to meet, as they see it, the needs

of members of their families, their neighbours or their friends - even, in some instances, before satisfying hunger. We all know of instances where a mother will go without a mid-day meal in order that her children should have enough money for the school outing, or for the instruments the teacher has asked that they should have. Similarly, I have met a number of old-age pensioners, grandmothers, who, if they happen to have several grandchildren some of whom unwisely choose to have birthdays in the same period of the year, will go without other necessities in order to make sure of buying a birthday card and gift to fulfil what they understand to be part of the role of grandmother. It is in relation to this kind of social obligation that we have to define human need.

The Extent of Poverty

The extent of poverty in Britain can, of course, be measured in a number of different ways. Officially, the government depends on studies of income and expenditure which go on continuously. They look at a random sample of the entire population each year, and on that information we know for example that in 1981 (the latest date for which we have this information) 3 million people had smaller incomes than those ordinarily paid out the basic rates of supplementary benefit. Those basic rates are taken to be the State's poverty standard, that is the Government's definition of what is meant by poverty. So in 1981 some 3 million people were below the poverty line. Another 7 millions were actually drawing the State's poverty income - in supplementary benefit - either in full or making up other incomes. And a further 5 millions in this country, in a population of 56 million, were just above this poverty line, I mean that they had incomes from 1 to 40% above the line; they just had from a few pence to £1 or £2 above that particular poverty line. So we are talking about some 15 million people - in the Government's own estimation - who are below, on, or only marginally above the poverty line.

And the first point to establish is that within that total, if we take those above the line and just on it, there are 5 main groups in our population. We are talking about 4 million in the families of those in full-time work with low wages; 2½ million people in the families of those who are unemployed; 6 million retirement pensioners, 2 million people in one-parent families, and ¾ million disabled or chronically sick. Those 5 groups are the groups whom we are describing and discussing when we talk about poverty in Britain. The number, they comprise, 15 million, has been growing since 1960. In 1960 those below the government poverty line as defined in terms of the basic supplementary benefit, or what was then known as the National Assistance rate, stood at 7¾ million. The number reached 11 million by 1979, so that it could be seen to have grown under successive governments of different political complexions. But since 1979 it has accelerated, reaching, as I have said, 15 million in 1981; and there is no doubt at all that with the rise since 1981 in unemployment, premature retirement, and indeed the numbers of disabled and one-parent families, has increased further.

Poverty in Bristol

The government's standard of supplementary benefit provides, as I expect

a lot of people present know, £26.80 per week for an adult living alone, an additional £16.70 for a spouse, and if there are children under the age of 11 for instance - it varies slightly according to age - £9.15 per child. Just over a pound a day, to keep a child of under 11. For a family of husband and wife and two children, therefore, the State's poverty line is £61.80 per week. This is a very low figure. It compares poorly with some of the rates paid in other countries in Europe, and it is now only a little over **one third** of what has been the average wage. In Bristol, of course, we see the problem reflected locally. In this city we have just a little under, but very close to, the average rate of unemployment. There are probably fewer 'grey' or 'black' areas - areas of considerable deprivation - but not a lot fewer. With colleagues at the Bristol and Weston Health Authority and in the Avon County Council Planning Department I have been looking at the evolution of deprivation in relation to health in Bristol, which provides illustrations of the kind of problems that arise locally.

There is a major difference in death rates between different wards within the city. This applies first of all to still-births and infant mortality. In the St. Paul's area together with Easton and St. Phillips, the still-birth and infant mortality rate is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times higher than it is in some of the residential suburbs like Durdham or Westbury-on-Trym. Similarly with the adult death rates: there are about $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as many deaths between the ages of 16 and 64 as in the middle-class suburban areas of the city; and the picture is similar again if we look at other criteria of health or deaths among the elderly population, or if we take measures of human development like the birthweight of babies - three times, or more, as many babies are born below the minimum healthy size in St. Paul's as in the more affluent suburbs. These are some of the tests of deprivation. Avon County Council has recently published a very valuable report on social stress which shows some of the enormous disparities or inequalities in the city: in terms of unemployment - the enormously heavy rate in the inner-city areas (over 30 per cent in places); disconnections of electricity as one kind of measure of hardship; or the number of children dependent on free school meals. For example, at the last count in 1981, 53% of all children in St. Paul's had to have free meals at school whereas the rate in some of the wealthier suburbs was 4, 5 and 6 per cent.

Although there are too few statistical indicators of the trends that have been taking place during the last ten years the differences between rich and poor wards are certainly wider today in some respects than in 1970. Unemployment has grown faster in poor than rich wards and there are other measures of steep rise in family deprivation (like disconnections).

These are the kinds of ways in which administrators, social scientists and others connected with the health service, look at the manner in which the problems of poverty and deprivation are reflected within the city of Bristol itself. Of course, the study of the phenomenon has to go back a great number of years. Part of our sense of urgency about poverty must be drawn from a sufficient historical perspective - of how things were a generation or two ago. One of the things I have come across recently is Herbert Tait's report on poverty in Bristol in 1938, when he found 11% of the city's families and 21% of its children living in poverty. And what we have to be aware of is the present

acceleration in the number of people, both here and throughout Britain, who are dependent on extraordinarily low incomes. Of course, we have to form views about how we approach this kind of problem, what we think is the solution to it; and obviously we welcome the appointment of the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Priority Areas. The Church has begun to play a part in alerting people to this problem and in calling attention to what might be done in all sorts of ways. And perhaps it's up to me in the closing minutes of this address to try and refer to some of the ways in which we, both as individuals and collectively, can exert some influence on the process of discussion, argument and action on poverty.

Absolutely crucial to our sense of urgency and action is how we explain the growth of poverty in our midst. Again, I have to summarise a whole range of thinking, of work, by social scientists. There has been a big debate in recent years about how far the **individual** is to blame for the mismanagement of income, for dependence on the welfare state than his or her own efforts within work and through savings, self-sufficiency, and exchange and reciprocity within his or her family. Britain, if I may make the point, is a culture which is too individualistic. A fascinating piece of research from Europe conducted recently by the European Commission showed the difference in perspective between the populations of different European countries. Much the highest proportion of the population, of any of the populations of Europe, in Britain, blamed the individual for poverty, mismanagement, scrounging, and abusing the welfare state, meaning by that that it was up to the individual to get him or herself out of the condition he or she was in. In other countries, people are much more inclined to voice structural reasons for poverty - to blame the government, the economy, the exploitative and selfish actions of those in power and the rich. However, social science evidence moves remorselessly in favour of a structural explanation of poverty. There is no question that many people with low incomes have high intelligence and considerable skill and potentiality; many of them have gone to extreme lengths in their search for work. I recently went to Glasgow where I heard the tragic case of one boy of seventeen who had tried to get work. He had made 125 applications for work, but failed; he had gone on the equivalent of the Youth Training Scheme as it was a year or two ago; he'd finished that after six months; he'd made another round of applications; then he committed suicide. His was an extreme instance, but the evidence there of people with a commitment to try to **do their best** for themselves, sometimes in a rather hopeless situation, in areas for instance where there simply aren't the jobs to be had, adds up to a testimony that emerges again and again from the social sciences. We do have to be aware of that testimony. Steven Platt's punctillious collection of data for Edinburgh for 1968 - 1982 shows that unemployed people are 20 times more likely than employed people to attempt suicide. This is a measure of the despair that is being manufactured in our country today.

The Causes of Poverty

So we are led back to structural causes for an answer when we ask: why is poverty increasing? It is increasing partly because of the vicissitudes of world trade and its effects on the economy; but it is increasing also because

of the particular view of economic management taken by this government. One can also blame the economic policies of previous governments, of course, by failing to generate new jobs through public action in the public sector, as well as through indirect incentives put before employers within the private sector. It seems strange to restrict the government's role and responsibility to indirect incentives, through relief of taxes for example, rather than direct action to create new forms of industry and new types of employment, and to make these **permanent** forms of employment rather than, as in our own employment programme, ad hoc temporising measures which so many people who are actually undertaking work in the Youth Training Scheme recognise as the temporary and insecure and peripheral and therefore not very central types of job which they are. It is a short-sighted approach to the management of our whole economy. There must be more permanent jobs in the public and not only the private sector, especially in manufacturing industry.

But of course there are many other things that we can identify in this process. We can identify the ways in which society undervalues the elderly and undervalues the needs of the disabled. We should **not** be taking the view that older people need less, and that their pensions should be a **lot less** than the incomes of those who are in work. Other societies have created pension systems where the level of pension is much closer to the wage level; and we have to ask ourselves how it is that we've fallen into this way of thinking of the needs of the elderly as being so very much less than those of active working people. This is also the case with disabled people. I have had discussions with Government Ministers, both Labour and Conservatives, who assume that because people are restricted to their homes, their need for income may be less - whereas, of course, the need for income is a **lot higher** on the part of **people who have to stay within the house all day**, rather than in an employer's **heated workroom** or office. Again, people who are disabled, have extra need **for heating**, as well as extra needs for aids for mobility and for transport. There are examples which can be multiplied. There is a substantial literature in the Social Sciences. There is very powerful evidence to suggest that if we try to weigh up people's needs in a rational manner, then of course we must develop benefit systems much more than we have, and refuse to accept a **minimalist** approach to the definition of human need.

Representing Poor People in the local Community

So what I'm saying is that in the identification of the causes of poverty, we have to look to the way in which the economy is managed in relationship to the needs of human beings within our population. We have to be aware that economic management is also social management, and that there are choices about how many jobs there are, how much the wage-earner should have as take-home disposable income, and how much the pensioner and the disabled receive. We have to enter into these arguments because they are decided socially - they are decided by boards of management, professions and unions, political parties and even in part by Parliament. There are local implications of this argument and I would wish to emphasize better representation of poor people locally.

I probably do not need to explain to many people present that a lot of the offices and staffing of the social services are under enormous pressure. This is certainly true of Social Security, where the number of staff has fallen at the same time as the number of clients and the number of items to be dealt with has sharply increased. Quite independent bodies like the Family Service Units the Quaker group, have called attention to the collapse of standards of service in many parts of the Social Security system. They say, and I quote from a report of the experience of 20 Units dotted around the country, that the claimants receive poor standards of service'. 'The features of these low standards' are, they go on:

- 1st. Difficulty in obtaining visits and/or action in relating to single payment requests and for urgent needs.
- 2nd. Delays in receiving agreed benefit payments.
- 3rd. Delays in responding to letters and sometimes no response at all.
- 4th. Extreme difficulty in making a telephone connection with officers who are able to handle the enquiry.
- 5th. Delays caused by case-note papers which are lost.

And so the catalogue continues. The National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux brought out a hair-raising report recently on the appalling conditions of work for many Social Security staff, and the difficulties of behaving in an honourable and respectful way towards claimants with genuine and severe income needs. Trying to cope with that system is enormously difficult, and yet, of course, locally there are so many people who feel individually despairing about making any request, who rather than make a claim, especially for a small amount of money, will go without. Part of the duty, it seems to me, of the local community, is to understand some of that despair and to make representations on behalf of these people, not only to the staff in question in the office, but through the staff to the headquarters and the ministries, the departments, the ministers and the politicians who are, in the end, responsible for creating this kind of chaos. That is a genuine and important local responsibility.

Local Rights and Responsibilities

A second objective is to convey information about rights and entitlements. I know, from reading a number of independent reports by social workers, research workers and religious groups in various parts of the country, that there are literally millions of people who do not get all the benefits and the services to which they are entitled under the law. In 1981 the Government estimated that over £500 million was unclaimed. There are more than a million elderly people, retirement pensioners, who are eligible to receive supplementary benefit who do not get it, for example; and there are many disabled people, including in particular people with 100% disablement who are living in their homes, some of whom - I've come across two or three in quite recent months - are unaware of their entitlement, for example, to the mobility allowance. It is important, through the voluntary services of the area, to support their efforts, and to encourage their efforts, to locate people who are eligible

to receive the right information and the right encouragement - because both are important - to go forward and seek their rights, and by that means to ensure that they have at least a better income - and indeed that they have a little more to spend in the locality, thereby helping the local economy to be a little better than it otherwise would be.

But information is not the only kind of community responsibility; There is the question of two-way or "equal" communication. We should recognise that if we have created this mess together through the structures of the State, then we can only get out of it together through recognition that we owe a great deal to the question of unity, letting people realise that while some of us are in luck and have work and higher incomes, we may not necessarily condone such severe inequalities as exist, and are prepared to reconsider the terms under which we are all members of the same community, in order to help improve the conditions, of those who, by a mixture of ill-luck and a very unfair and malevolent system, have come to be far more deprived than ourselves. And I think that there are signs within the country at large - not necessarily within parties, political parties, alone, but within the professions, within the administrative sections of society, and within the Church - of recognising that a greater degree of fellowship is needed, above all today in the conditions of the 1980's.

It's on that note I must conclude. There is a great deal that I have left unsaid, but to my mind this theme of fellowship which the Church has taught and which, in their different ways, some of those who care about social relations, fraternity and social equality in other movements, some of them political, share-is the most important value of all. There is the human recognition that "there, but for the grace of God, go I". It is a recognition that some of us may have more than we deserve, and that we must not assume that undue prosperity, any more than undue fortune, is a natural right of any individual. The kind of society we live in is the creature of the values that we have allowed to reign; and believe me, we have allowed in recent years the values of selfishness and selfaggrandisement to rule far too strongly. We must now revert to this theme of fellowship, far more than we have done, and must develop it, deepen it and elaborate on it in our writing and in our political and religious discussions, in order to defeat the social ills of our time.

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CHAPTER 5

LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES - DAVID MOORE

I'd like to begin by rereading the words of the Gospel:

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
for he has annointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

I'm not sure that I've been called to set the captives free, yet I'm sure that from where I stand, as a black person committed in faith to Christ, that I must address myself to a situation that countless thousands of people like myself find ourselves in. I cannot speak as a leader, for I've not been elected; I cannot speak as a spokesman for all black people, for we're not a homogeneous group, and within our ranks there is a diversity of opinion in much the same way that there is a diversity of opinion within the rest of society; I cannot speak as a representative of the people of Brixton, for I'm not sure to what extent my views would find support in that community. I speak then as an individual, putting forward ideas that are based upon the experience of being an Anglican, black, and the only Afro-Caribbean Anglican Priest born in this country.

Who are the Captives?

The title I've been given to speak to begs an important question in my mind, and that is, who are 'the captives'?

My experience of visiting prisons tells me that not only are the inmates captives, but so too are their jailers. Those who oppress are as much victims of their own actions as those whom they seek to oppress; hence liberation, when it comes, must not only set free the oppressed, but to be true liberation it must also set free from bondage those who oppress. Let me say in that context that anything which degrades and dehumanises a person is oppression. Those who suffer the indignity of racism are victims; yet, by the nature of racism, those who practise it are victims as well, because their blindness to the suffering of other human beings means that they are suppressing part of their own humanity, and thus they degrade themselves. If one wished to put it into a shorthand theological framework, the argument would go: if one accepts that all people are made in the image of God, then to deny a person respect as a human being on the grounds of the colour of their skin is to reject part of God's creation. To reject part of God's creation is a rejection of part of God, and that rejection of God is a blasphemy.

Racism, and all that goes with it, is an offence to God. In addressing ourselves to it, we as a people are addressing ourselves to an issue that has the capacity to block people off from the love of God, and as Christians we are required to engage in the struggle to liberate people into Christ. However, in saying that, I'm mindful of the old Negro spiritual which goes:

When Israel was in Egypt's land - let my people go,
Oppressed so hard they could not stand - let my people go.
**Go down Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go.**

Thus said the Lord, old Moses said, **Let my people go,**
If not you'll find your first-born dead - **let my people go.**
**Go down Moses, way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go.**

The trouble for Pharaoh in the story of Moses is that he did not listen. He hardened his heart to the plight of the Israelites and forced God actively to make him listen. Perhaps in the coming months the Church will have to rise above the temptation to go deaf when it hears things that are not comfortable to live with, and, through positive action, will allow God's children to move forward to the promised land.

After the major disturbances throughout throughout the inner urban areas of America in the 1960's, Martin Luther King Jnr said that 'a riot is an expression of a people who have not been listened to'. His words are so true, even today.

UNACKNOWLEDGED HISTORY.

For the last thirty years, we as a people have spoken about the experience of life in our country. I say 'our country' because it is, by historical fact, and identification, our country too. We have contributed to its growth and its development for over 400 years. If I were being particularly pernicky I would suggest that our contribution goes back futher than that - indeed, one could actually trace its beginnings to 210 AD when the Libya born Roman Emperor Septimus Severus stationed Aurenians' own Moors on Hadrian's Wall: that's an historical fact. (He also based the Syrian boatmen there - don't ask me why they put boatmen on Hadrian's Wall, I really don't know!) But the fact is that from 1555 onwards black people settled in this country. They were first brought as interpreters. They were taken from the coasts of Africa and brought to Britain to be taught to speak English so that they could act as interpreters in slave trading. In fact, the black population of this country was so large at one stage that in 1596 Elizabeth I wrote a letter to the city of London Corporation saying that she was concerned at the number of 'Blackamoors' who were roaming the streets and causing disturbances, and she put forward proposals for them to be returned to their native land. The project failed! She tried to get the same thing done again in 1601, and again the project failed. And according to the **Gentlemen's Magazine** in 1745, the estimated black population of London alone was 20,000 out of a total of 100,000; and they were not all slaves. A considerable number of those black people were free - they were courtesans, they were artists, they were skilled craftsmen. In 1814 the British Army engaged in a war with America, and at the seige of New Orleans 1,000 Jamaican black soldiers fought alongside the British: historical fact. The great writer of the English Dictionary, Samuel Johnson, had a servant - not a slave,

a servant; and when, according to schoolboy history books, Dr. Johnson became so despairing of his dictionary that he threw it into the fire, it was this servant who rescued it. Nobody tells you that the servant was black. This is a fact that is omitted. The denial of the existence of black people is a denial of their history, and if you deny a person's history they cannot be truly human.

The history of black settlement in this country since 1948 alone is one of pain and anguish. When my father was asked in 1940 to come and defend his country, he signed up. And he came, arriving in Britain in the middle of the night on a troopship, and he fought in the RAF along with thousands of other black men while back home his mother and his father were raising money to make Spitfires to defend "our" country. At the end of the War he chose not to return to the West Indies, but to stay in the United Kingdom. Throughout the 1940's, 50's and 60's, thousands and thousands of black people were invited to come to Britain - indeed, one of the Ministers of Health in the Conservative Party, The Hon. Enoch Powell, actually instituted a policy for bringing over the black people. Of course, we forget that now - or we choose to forget it. And what happened to these people? By and large, the majority of them were good Methodists, Baptists and Anglicans - the majority were Anglicans. And when they arrived in our cities, they found that the beliefs that they had, that they were British were not shared by many people in this country; even when they went to church it was made quite clear that they weren't 'quite like us'. Towards the end of the 1950's they were even showing films in the West Indies - I believe it was the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel who produced one film - on how you should behave when you are in a church in Britain. It said; 'When you go to church, you will find that it is different. People come to church to worship God, and don't be surprised if they don't want to sit near you or talk to you, they have better things to do with their time'. And so these black people came. They had cards signed by their parish priest stating that they were communicant members of the Church of England. So they attended churches and they worshipped. It's not an exaggeration to say that at the end of the services the ministers standing at the back door said to them, 'It is lovely to see you here. You must find it quite different from back home. There is a more exciting church, like you are used to, down the road.' They were rejected, and many left; and one can trace the development of the Pentecostal churches in Britain with the decline of black Anglican worshippers staying in the church. The people at that time were not overt racists, and that is an important point to remember. They were not overt racists; they were what we call unintentional racists. They had, throughout their schooling, throughout their lives, picked up unconsciously a set of beliefs and attitudes about black people, which were negative. That, I believe, is one of the major issues that the present Archbishop's Commission has to face.

The need for re-education

How does one re-educate people who have been fed misinformation, You can still find books in schools that tell you that all Eskimos live in igloos. You can still find books that tell you that people in Africa wear grass skirts and run around and live up tree houses. The stereotypes that we use in our society

unconsciously affect how we view other people, and when those unconscious thoughts are brought into play within our working situations we create institutional and structural racism. Here is a good example: where I live, the local authority did a lot of rehousing in the 1970's; they put on a question paper the innocent question 'Where do you like to shop?', and on your answer to that, depended which estate you went to. Now if you happen to come from an Afro-Caribbean background, you actually like shopping in a particular place because you can buy all the things that you need, that you like, there. So you put down that you shop in Brixton and you like shopping in Brixton. You don't put down 'Streatham' because they don't sell anything there that you want. That determines where you live. An innocent question - but you then end up with a concentration of black people placed in estates in Brixton, and white working-class people placed in estates in up-market Streatham. And then the Council turns round and says 'Why is it that we've got all these black people living on the estates in Brixton?' But the question would determine where they were going to go, because nobody has stopped to think through what are the shopping habits, what are the eating habits, of one particular group of people as opposed to another. A simple example. The Archbishop's Commission has to look at the nature of structural racism and institutional racism, not only in this country as a whole, but also in the church itself.

Racism in the Church

The Commission's job, as I have already said is to look at racism as revealed in the context of the Church itself. How can a Church criticise society when the Church actually may well be practising the same thing itself? And what happens when the Church deliberates upon the nature of racism, and then has to do something? So often the trouble with structures is that they understand only too well their theology, that God speaks; but so often they forget the other side of the coin, that not only does God speak, he also acts. At the end of the great deliberations of this Commission, a report will be drawn up, and it will be submitted to General Synod, and there will be a great debate; but then what? Will it be like so many other great documents that have been presented to the Church: have lots of debate, and no action? If the Church is serious in being concerned about the poor and the oppressed, then it must do something - and when I say the words 'poor' and 'oppressed' I do not address myself solely to black people, because there are a lot of poor white people in this country and the forces that oppress black people oppress them too.

The Commission is landed with the great task of looking at the inner city and coming up with answers. Perhaps one of the first things it must address itself to is what we are doing withdrawing our physical presence from the inner city, what happens when you shove your church into a little church hall and you get rid of the big buildings? By and large the community forgets we exist; we've vanished. So how do we use the physical resources we have constructively, maintaining the important function of worship, but also opening up our buildings to the parish, to the geographical area? How do we prepare those with great talents within our congregation to take an active part in leadership?

If we have training it must take into account people's cultural and class distinctions. Any course of training in the area where I live involves 'getting to know one another'. I don't know if that happens here in Bristol, but basically we all sit in a big group, and you talk to your neighbour and he or she talks to you, and then you play games by touching one another so that you get the feel of a person. Basically the people that think up those games are middle-class and white. Culturally, if you were to ask a black woman aged fifty years to stand with a man and touch him from the tip of his head down to his feet, look at the reaction on her face. It's culturally unacceptable, you would not do it. If we're going to have training and building up of training, we have to take cultural factors into account. I would also like to suggest that the same thing would apply to many white working-class; they would find the whole notion, as it were, of spilling your guts on the floor and trampling around in them, foolish. We have therefore to think very carefully, about what training is to be provided, so as not simply to rehash what is already there.

We have to look at the issues that affect us in terms of staffing parishes, the varied types of ministry; and I'm afraid if one happens to be a Bishop or an Archdeacon, one has to face the questions that will apply. What happens when we have a young black man or woman who offer themselves for ordination, get through the training and have to be placed in a parish? We are all to some extent racists, although we are not necessarily aware of it. We have to face the prospect of a parish being offered a black clergyman and the people get quite freaked out - they are not used to being told what they can and cannot do by a black person! In exactly the same way, many may experience a freak-out sensation who have to work with a woman as their boss - it can trigger off all sorts of feelings that we didn't even know were there. Getting used to other people's positions of authority against a background of ideas of superiority and inferiority can be a very difficult process. What mechanism does a church develop to handle that? How do we allow those who have not experienced power to participate in it without our actually appearing to be doing them a favour? There's no point in our conning ourselves that if you elect a black church-warden that means that you have equality in the Church. It doesn't mean a thing. Those are issues that the Commission has to face. There are issues there that all Christians have to face: how do we enter into the suffering of others and uphold each other?

Empty gestures or real action?

What we don't want are empty, token gestures. You do not appoint someone to be a Bishop **because** he's black. The person must have the qualities that you require of a Bishop. To say, 'Why, you know, this would be a great token gesture' would be all it would be - because the issue that would then be raised, would be, 'where in your institution's system have you brought in the mechanism for others to develop their ministry within the structure of the Church?' Just taking one and putting him in at the top wouldn't make any difference - just as in a parish, running around and finding a black person to be the churchwarden, or in some churches, I suppose, running around and finding a woman to be the churchwarden, so that one can say 'We've got one', is an empty gesture, if the rest of the PCC isn't affected. A gesture must be

genuine, and that means a lot of heart-searching, it means a lot of change in attitude and ways of behaving, and that takes time. But it doesn't take too long. One of the useful methods of control in the past has been: 'Yes, well, we agree with that - but you know it does take time'. You can end up waiting thousands of years. It's a bit like - if I can use an unfortunate analogy, in a sense - General Synod saying 'There are no theological reasons why we cannot ordain women, but the time isn't right!!' I can remember in the Book of Revelation, when one of the trumpets sound, the faithful look up to heaven and they say, 'Lord, how long?', and he says, 'Not long, not long'.

The Church has to move forward in this country, and it has to move forward in unity, because we are meant to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts and minds of all people; which means that we have to value people. Having value in them, we must rejoice in and uphold the diversity that exists, not attempt to produce a uniform group of identical people. We actually have to learn how to release people so that they can use the gifts and talents that God has given them. And that is difficult for any institution. There are hundreds of young men who have gone through theological training colleges who are working-class and are not working-class any more. They've been purged of their working-class background. They might make an empty token gesture of wearing red braces and pulling them once in a while to show their origin, but they can't fool anyone, because the Church as an institution, and like any efficient institution has the capacity to absorb people into itself and make them as it wishes them to be. Therefore the Church as an institution has to learn how to draw people in and allow them to retain the gifts and qualities that they have been given by God, and use them. That may be very uncomfortable, because you will actually have people who don't quite conform to the way you want them to be. And that is difficult for any institution: to actually learn how to use those gifts.

Breaking the chains that bind us all.

In a recent television programme, the Revd Tony Ottey, a priest in the Diocese of Southwark, said: 'So often in the past the Church of England has been a giving church - we give to everybody - that we have lost the capacity to receive'. How do we ensure, how do those working so hard on the Commission ensure, that the Church comes to an understanding of that ability to receive from each other? If the Church does not address itself to that issue it will become like the religion of Ancient Egypt, sterile and dead, because we know it is a fact that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are many and varied and to attempt to control them is an attempt to play around with God. We must open ourselves and uphold each other, because only through upholding and allowing that Spirit to move can we be set free from our own captivity and bondage; because at the end of the day we have built the chains that surround us, and we are the people who maintain those chains. We have actually to allow God to break the chains that we have chosen to oppress ourselves in.

CHAPTER 6

SET THE DOWNTRODDEN FREE - JULIA PELLETT

Isaiah 61: 1 - 11 is a poem not so much for an age, but for all time. It is a prophetic poem of the gospel that heralded in Jesus' message, in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4 16-20) and it is notable for its personal tone. Its affinities with the 'servant' passages have naturally suggested that the servant is speaking, for though the speaker in Isaiah 61 does not call himself a servant, the mission he sets before himself recalls that of the servant in Chapters 41: 1, 48: 16 and 50 : 4. He is our evangelist, consecrated and endowed of the Lord to declare the coming year of the Lord's favour; he was sent primarily to the distressed and the downhearted people of God, and they are described as 'the afflicted', 'the broken hearted', 'the captives' and 'the bound' - somewhat akin to our underprivileged in this day and age; though probably, not those caught up in prison, in that sense of being bound, or in captivity, as we have in other countries, but rather as being in a confining and oppressive social situation.

For the Jews, the confused and chaotic years which followed the return from exile brought misgovernment, poverty and moral disintegration. They had been buoyed up by lofty hopes; as a people they had become physically and spiritually wretched and needed a vision of new hope for their future. Obviously new hope was given; but there was continuing suffering - as indeed there has been, down through the ages, of all people, all God's people.

These words from Isaiah are hallowed by Christians because of their use by Jesus at Nazareth to outline his mission. They set forth the work of the spiritual community in Israel, and that of the Christian Church, its ministers and all its people: a mission assigned by God then, as now, to the people of God, to work towards bringing new hope into the lives of men and women.

'A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM'.

'To set the downtrodden free', we read in Isaiah and Luke. But what are we doing about it in the Christian Church today? We speak of a gospel **that** we have to proclaim and a mission to fulfil at a time when it appears that we are withdrawing our manpower from areas of need because we cannot afford to maintain a presence in the inner city, or in our housing estates, or even in village situations that are very isolated. We've a gospel to proclaim and a mission alongside the poor, the downtrodden and the helpless; and yet many of our middle-class churches do not want to know about those only a mile down the road, who have acute problems to face and find it impossible to rise above them. Ignorance also plays, and is allowed to go on playing, a part in the lives of those who have much to give in time and energy. Thus the gulf widens, and the understanding of the basic and fundamental needs of people lessens, until in some cases it ceases to be recognised. How can this be? How can we say this, when through the media of television and radio and the newspapers there appears to be adequate coverage of the problems that appear in our society today?

Let me tell you of an incident that occurred some years ago when I had been asked to speak to a group of upper-middle-class people about mission alongside those in need. My account was based on my experience as a Probationer Deaconess in Liverpool, seeing at first-hand how people had to live, the way in which they themselves felt that they could never come up from the depths of despair, that they were never really accepted by those around them. They had no voice in any place or any sphere of life whatsoever. At the close of the meeting, after I had left them with questions to think about at the end, several people came across and said, 'We do not believe that people could possibly live as you have been describing. They meant it because they themselves believed it. The Christian Church in that area was so divorced from the kind of reality of life that I had experienced in Liverpool, that they were not even willing, after hearing something of this message brought to them, to believe that it could possibly be true, that there were people in need. For them, as for many, there is a failure to recognise that there **are** the downtrodden in our society, failure to recognise that there **are** people who, having tried to raise themselves up and out of the environment in which they've become enslaved, find they cannot do so. Hence they stay where they are, often **without hope**, often without knowing how to go about trying to work their lives out or sort out the problems that face them.

Then we have those who use the means of exploitation to keep people where they want them; where people are paying extortionate rents for uninhabitable rooms, and where, because there is nowhere else to go, **they are forced** to accept the tyranny of squalor. The helpless, the downtrodden, the unemployed are often those who find themselves the victims of the profiteer. They become people without a voice, and they become fearful of attempting to fight back in case of reprisals.

Also we have the long-term unemployed with a family to maintain on very low incomes and in poor housing, beginning - and the family beginning - to suffer the effects of the situation in which they find themselves. And unemployed young people who live in areas of great deprivation and see no hope for the future: these are already feeling rejected. Also those who are vagrants and homeless are often pushed from pillar to post with no chance to escape from the world in which they live in order that they might try to find something better.

It says in Scripture that we shall always have the poor with us - but that is no reason for the Christian Church or any other body to leave the poor and the downtrodden where they are. We are commissioned to be a servant church, and a servant church we must be. For us there must be an expression of a concern for a 'just, free and sustainable society'. We must have a genuine commitment to the poor, the needy and the underprivileged, for they, like us, have a right to a full human life.

We must also be concerned for people as whole persons. Mother Teresa in her ministry of caring is very aware that one cannot talk about Christ and Salvation unless one cares for people where they are. Where she is, they are crying out for the basic needs of life; for them, her caring will mean being

taken from the gutters of Calcutta to live or to die, but to do so being recognised as human beings with thoughts and feelings, hopes and desires; and most of all to be seen as children of God. The love of Christ is then seen at work by the very action of those who have cared.

WHAT CAN WE OFFER?

So, then, what can the churches do to share in the ministry of healing, the setting free of the oppressed? First of all, to strive towards showing a determination to ensure that there is a proper Church presence in and ministry to disadvantaged areas. Then to seek to meet with sensitivity the needs of those in the Church and the general community who are unemployed, poor, under pressure, excluded from educational and social opportunities. To make it possible for our church buildings to be used far more readily than they are at present, to meet the needs of the community in which that church is set. To educate our congregations in suburban areas that they have a positive role to play as enablers when it comes to the giving of help and care, and a sharing in inner-city areas and comparable estate situations. Also, we must ask what help our own churches can give to the destitute, to those in need, whatever that need may be. And what gifts within our churches that we may have to share in order to build up the lives of others, in order that they may become complete, whole and full members of the Body of Christ.

To recognise also - and very importantly - the 'gifts of the poor' and the downtrodden; the acceptance of people as ordinary human beings looking for a life of purpose, and one, like our own, made up of 'praise in every part'. We have a duty to work towards a goal of making people whole and not simply paying lip-service to it all.

SHARING THE TASK.

And last, but not least: could not the Church of England and the Methodist Church, these two great bodies that already have committees and working parties to look at mission alongside the poor, begin to work closer together - and better still, hand in hand? For it is the Christian Church as a whole that should be speaking to the needs of our society and attempting to meet those needs. God has called the Body of Christ to go forward, to stretch out its hand in love, in friendship and in positive action. As we do so, we witness to Christ with sensitivity, remembering that in the New Testament salvation and freedom had to do with the whole person, body, mind, emotions and spirit. So therefore let us look very carefully at all the areas in which the Church as a whole can be working together, and not merely sitting down and talking about those things which ought to be done, but actually doing some of them. So that we do start to bring relief to the oppressed and to the downtrodden, we do begin to bring into the lives of those whom we have been called to serve, new vision and hope - that selfsame vision and hope that you and I have, and would go on asking for - because they, like us, are the children of God and must surely be enabled to share in the same things that we ourselves have. Life on this earth in its fullness. And ultimately, life everlasting.

For further reading:-

Two Nations - One Gospel

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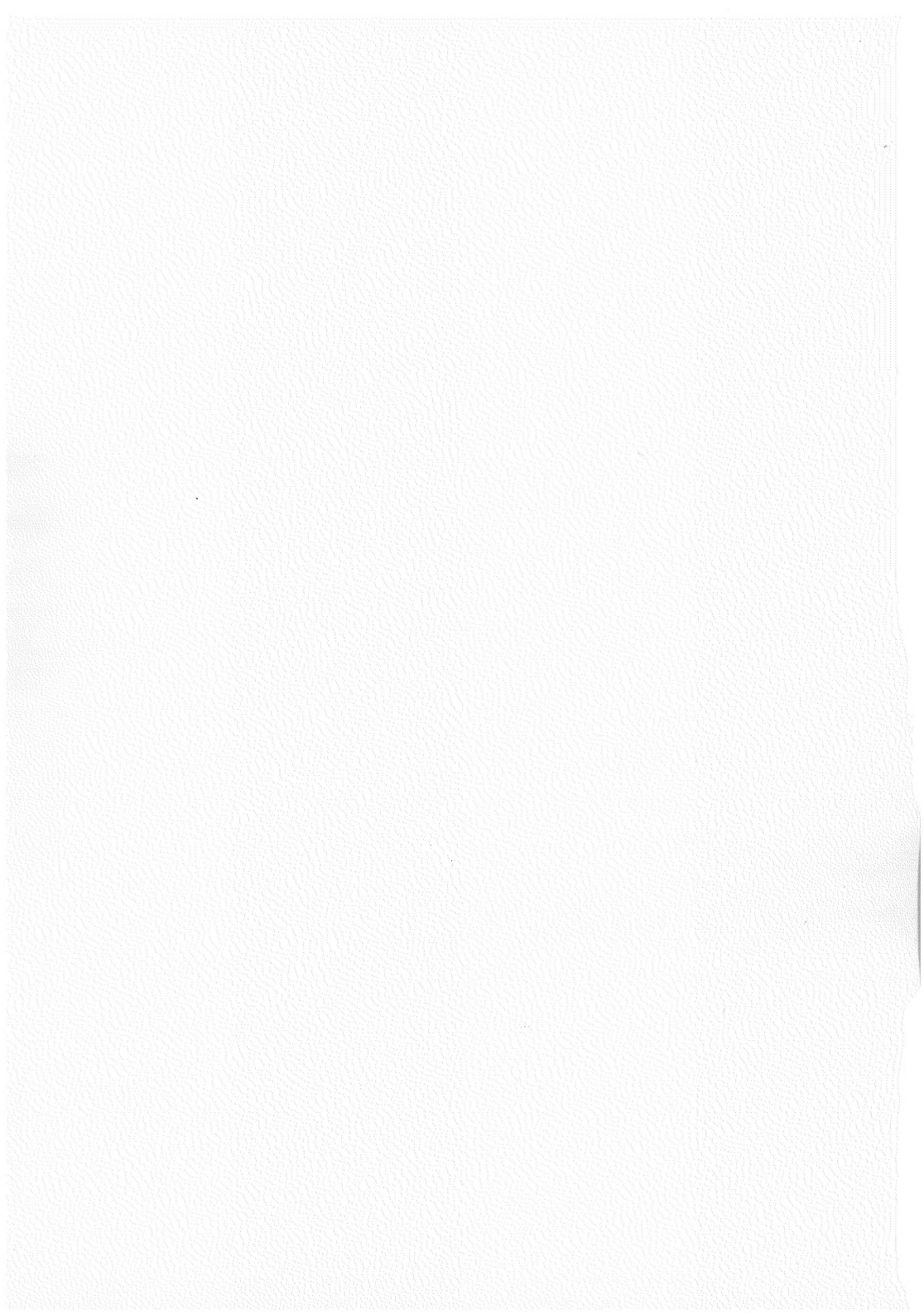
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The Church in the Council Housing Estate

Authors: Jeffery Harris and Peter Jarvis

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